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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIAN COURIER

On leaving: a response to John Suk's departure from the CRC

Julia Prins Vanderveen

"Did you hear John Suk left?" asked my friend as she popped over for a visit.

I shook my head, "No," as I waved my hand in an explanatory manner over our living room, our three young sons at play and their toys strewn about everywhere. I shrugged as I'm often slightly out of the loop during this stretch of maternity leave. Then she asked, "What do you think of that?. . ."

After having mulled over it for some time, there are a few things I keep coming back to: 1) nostalgia and the nature of leaving, 2) dogma bellies, 3) humility, and finally, 4) Abraham's journey. But first, a bit about my own vantage point.

Suk "laments the CRC's stiff, overly dogmatic nature."

Leaving and nostalgia

As an ordained pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church in Vancouver along with my husband Trevor, I have seen many people come and go. Ours is an urban church with an especially high turnover. However, not all departures are equal. Some are hardly noticed. Some really hurt.

I knew that even from before my days as pastor. My grandparents left the Christian Reformed Church when I was coming of age. Their move was a deeply hurtful transition for our whole family. Ironically, they left over the issue which none of us knew would eventually define my calling: women in ministry.

John Suk's departure hurts too. It hurts because he was a leader and many Christian Reformed folks knew his name, whether we really knew him or not. And his longevity as editor of *The Banner* probably gave us a sense of stability and familiarity. So his resignation comes with the brushstrokes of disappointment and perhaps, for some, even betrayal. Leaving always means that someone is left behind. And leaving is not reversible. One can't

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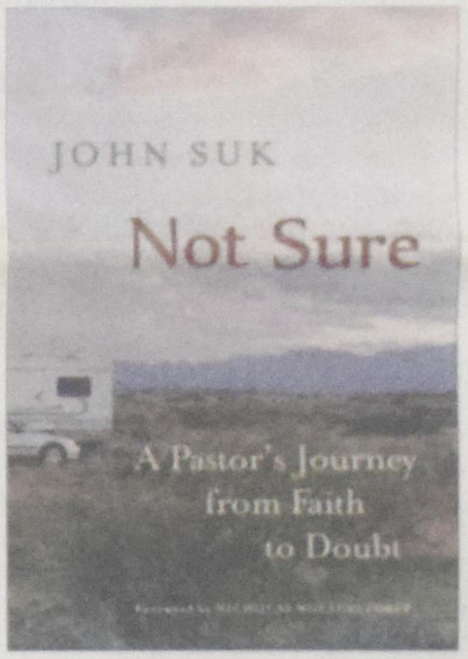
John Suk gave his final sermon at Grace CRC, Cobourg, in June.

A sad, open 'Dear John' letter

James C. Dekker

Dear John Suk,

I count you as a friend and colleague, though – and this is the immediate occasion of this letter – now a colleague in another denomination. That saddens me personally. But what I have to say is not only personal; it is of wider consequence than our collegial relationship. You were a long-time, trusted, now regrettably former, leader in the Christian Reformed Church. So, it is fitting that I write you an open letter. With your long experience in publications, feel free to respond publicly and/or privately, as you wish.



As I said above, I was and remain saddened by the news in your blog (May 21, 2012 **faithisntwhatyouthink.blogspot.ca**) that you were resigning as pastor in the CRC and perforce at Grace CRC in Cobourg; I'm sure Grace and many colleagues are saddened also. Your reasons were clear, yet not very surprising. Anyone who has read *Not Sure* realizes you finally gave public voice to long-private struggles. You believed your conclusions necessarily impinged on your commitment to the theological foundations of the CRC and your call as a pastor among us.

Yet – and here perhaps I show my own colours a little more boldly than might be safe – I deeply wonder why you were unable to remain "one of us." You say that as a leader and pastor you could no longer stand up week after week preaching what you did not heartily believe; I get that. Still, I cannot help wondering if you made an unfitting (I will not say "wrong") decision. So I'll now tell you why.

You cite movingly in *Not Sure* (p. 54) your "intellectual heroes" (may I be so bold as to call them also spiritual heroes?), who are mine too. They continue to believe and remain in the CRC. I wonder why you personally could not stay, using those heroes as mentors and fellow travelers? Are not they, along with many others in Reformed and ecumenical traditions, also sometime or regular doubters who believe, despite ourselves? Are you not, as I argued in my online review (**amazon.com/Not-Sure-Pastors-Journey-Faith**) another who has and continues to go through doubt that opened up to a different, simpler, yet more robust faith? You would not have the faith you have now without your previous and current doubt.

You and our contemporary Reformed heroes are not alone. Abra-

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News

On leaving *continued*

simply return to the way things were should the move not turn out as planned.

Suk's first chapter of *Not Sure* concludes with a telling of his own intense nostalgia for his childhood and his childlike faith. What unfolds in his book is his realization that there's no going back. No homecoming or departure will ever be able to capture what was. While he wishes for good old days, he laments the way things have become: stiff, coercive and overly dogmatic.

Dogma bellies

In another book, the recent *New York Times* #1 bestseller, *Wheat Belly*, William Davis states that it is "not their fault" that North Americans have experienced negative consequences of a diet filled with whole grains. The food industry has taught that wheat is essential to a healthy lifestyle. The problem, according to Davis, is that our bodies can't properly digest genetically modified wheat and that one of the consequences is a bulging mid-section, as well as, for some, chronic constipation and even cardiac disease.

Could it be that many of us are walking around with bulging dogma bellies, having been fed a diet of highly processed doctrine? We faithfully consume generous portions of theological grains believing that it must be good for us. It is how we were brought up. And even if some of it is a bit stale, we butter it up and swallow. The result is not only proud, protuberant bellies, but also lack of inspired movement, and, in worse case scenarios, erratic and antagonistic cardiac output.

In this regard, Suk's response to the "problem" of the reformed diet is insightful and invites us to deeper self-examination: has our well-intended theological diet been serving us well? No doubt, this is uncomfortable work and the identity crisis we encounter in *Not Sure* may well prompt a corporate identity crisis among us, if we aren't experiencing one already. Who are we and what do we believe? The instinct among some of us may be to "batten down the hatches" – to redefine more carefully who we are, why we must remain distinct and why we ought to stay in the denomination. But is this the best response?

Humility

Last year, around the same time that John Suk's book came out, *Humilitas* hit the shelves. Written by Australian author John Dickson, the book explores the lost virtue of humility. The titles *Not Sure* and *Humilitas* may actually be two sides of the same coin. Dickson advocates that we hold our convictions firmly but do so with a soft heart toward those who hold contrary convictions. He points out that we have forgotten how to flex two mental muscles at the same time: the muscle of conviction and the muscle of compassion. Humility applied to convictions does not mean believing things any less; it means treating those who hold contrary beliefs with respect and friendship.

My husband and I recently came across a helpful, if not humourous, exercise for premarital counseling. The couple must look one another in the eye and say, "You are not my enemy." Even though we sometimes feel as though our partners get in our way, he or she is not really the enemy! This may apply to friends and acquaintances too. John Suk, though he left the Christian Reformed denomination, is not our enemy either. Neither is Suk's departure equivalent to a battle move. He is free to go, and so are the others who choose to do so. Even when our baptisms and professions of faith include covenantal language of belonging, that belonging ultimately does not limit us to membership only within the Christian Reformed Church. The Church is bigger than our denomination.

Dickson also quotes G.K. Chesterton: "What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth. This has been exactly reversed."

What does this mean for our denomination? In many ways, the departure of so many and our response to it do not bode well. These days are watershed for the church as we have known it and nostalgia will only disappoint. What we are called to do is remember, not with sentimentality, but with obedience. Not only that, we might benefit from a bout of uncertainty about ourselves and a shift toward humility regarding our doctrines. Let our remembering be rooted in our identity as created people – yes, Reformed – but not only reformed. We are more than our denominational affiliation. And perhaps we could lighten up just a little. What if we gathered together as community who enjoy one another with kindness and charity rather than as one longing wistfully for days past or one trying to conjure up solid arguments for remaining the way we are?

Abraham

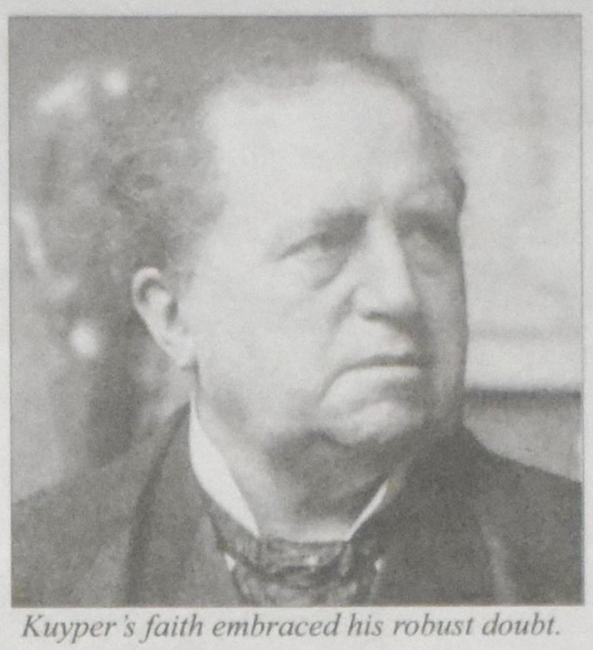
Finally, toward the end of his book, Suk explores the story of Abraham, highlighting Abraham's lack of knowledge and assurance. What he doesn't draw attention to is the way Abraham's story begins with departure from the familiar. God called Abram up out of Ur and Abram left.

In our case, both those who leave and those who stay enter into unfamiliar territory, wandering and wondering: what will come next? Where will God lead us? How will we express the call to love God and walk humbly with him, even as we maintain our faithful convictions? And how will we love our neighbour?

Julia Prins Vanderveen has been a part-time pastor for the last five years along with her husband Trevor at the First CRC in Vancouver. The other part of the time, Julia is enjoying life at home with their young boys, Gideon, Levi and Philip.

Letter *continued*

ham Kuyper was a world-class believer and leader, possibly because he was also a robust doubter. I remember being surprised at Kuyper's doubt eloquently articulated in his rigorous devotional *Near unto God*. Yet his doubt never embraced his faith – quite the other way about. I really do not read your doubt as trumping your faith – tempering, toughening, but not destroying.



Kuyper's faith embraced his robust doubt.

Further, we all know Christian mystics and heroes whose doubt became very public, doubt that drove them to lasting faith through dark nights of the soul. Mother Theresa's posthumously published *Come Be My Light* is first chilling, finally deeply comforting, especially as she so openly confessed to her superiors how hard it was to hang on by fingernails to faith. Reading her spiritual struggles reminded me again and again that it probably was not she who was hanging onto God, but God who was holding her more securely than she could feel – yet always prayed and hopefully imagined. (In this connection, check out good old *Psalter Hymnal* #498!)

We could dig into our shared histories to find scores of doubting believers. Take Thomas Moore, St. John of the Cross, St. Augustine and others up to and including St. Paul (Romans 8), St. Peter Dęnier and St. Thomas Doubter. The list goes on and on. Many of my younger and older colleagues doubt regularly some doctrines as expressed in certain confessions. Sometimes I think we wouldn't have reasons to get together for lunch or coffee if we didn't doubt so much.

Doubt, it turns out, becomes, in the ever more mysterious grace of God, an agonizing fuel for deeper faith commitment. I cannot explain how that happens, but I testify to that myself. I am sure most of the people subjected weekly to my preaching get that about me too. Yet God hangs on to all of us. Couldn't you have let God keep hanging onto you within the CRC? You belonged here for 50-plus years. Don't you really still belong "with us"?

Sure, I understand your doubts about the CRC's confessional framework. Decades ago we both signed the nearly 400 year-old Form of Subscription. Yet, like our bodies, our minds and spirits change shape over years. I couldn't wear clothes I wore when I got married – nor would I want to. Similarly, we read the Bible, creeds and confessions differently, more deeply, even more honestly and critically as we grow older and more thoughtful. Perhaps we know we have less to lose.

By that I mean that confessionally and biblically the clothes don't fit exactly as they did years ago, but they're still in the closet for reference, memory, not nostalgia. I, for one, have never elevated the creeds and confessions anywhere near a level with the Bible, but I love them and they give, as Neal Plantinga has said, "a place to stand."

Still, in preaching and teaching I have raised questions about many confessional formulations in our ironically named "Three Forms of Unity" – ironic because denominations that have angrily disunited from each other also use them. Many hearers have expressed appreciation for preaching honesty; it has let them know that they are not alone. Instead of weakening, such conversations have strengthened their commitment not to the mis-named Reformed "faith," but to an expression of the Reformed tradition that they had not earlier recognized was legitimate within the bounds of the Form of Subscription.

Not all our colleagues share my perceptions and teachings about the confessions. Regardless, I would still today be able to sign the former Form of Subscription. Even though for four years I chaired our denomination's study committee that produced the new Covenant for Officebearers (**crcna.org**), I remain convinced that the old form as interpreted in Supplement 5 of the Church Order gave sufficient room to sign without mental reservation. Don't get me wrong, I am pleased with the new Covenant – which you thought we could never agree on. It reaches much deeper into the ecumenical and biblical world than the 17th century Form of Subscription could ever have envisioned.

And yes, I also understand your problems with current CRC issues: homosexuality, evolution, women's issues, among other things. Synod 2011 sadly silenced the homosexuality conversation and did absolutely nothing to minister to gay family members or friends. Yet homosexuality is not a deal-breaking issue in Christianity as a whole. It has a place in church and public discourse, but it really takes up far more space and energy than is wise or warranted, considering it is mentioned so infrequently in the Bible and never by Jesus.

Secondly, within the CRC and our institutions of higher learning much frontier scholarship on evolution is acceptable and encouraged within our confessional framework. Not a few hold to young earth and brief creation positions as well; there is room for both. These are not foundational confessional issues; they are disagreements about biblical interpretation, all of which

See **Letter** *on page 3*

Column

Principalities & Powers
David Koyzis

A polarized election

Once upon a time in a land to the south of us, the Democratic and Republican Parties were big-tent organizations, trying to appeal to as wide a swath of public opinion as they could manage. Although the Republicans were generally conservative and the Democrats generally liberal, there was a huge area of overlap between them. They were divided, not so much by governing philosophies, as by somewhat divergent interest groups along with their pet issues. Big business tended to support the Republicans, while big labour was onside of the Democrats.

In those days there were conservative Democrats, many from the south, who championed the rights of the states over what they saw as an excessively intrusive federal government. Senator Strom Thurmond and Alabama Governor George Wallace exemplified this group. There were also liberal Republicans, such as the late Illinois Senator Charles Percy, who introduced legislation to encourage the building of affordable housing for low-income families. After the US Supreme Court legalized abortion on demand in 1973, the two parties were internally divided on the issue, with pro-choice Republicans and pro-life Democrats sharing the political landscape with pro-life Republicans and pro-choice Democrats. Even Senator Edward Kennedy initially considered himself pro-life.

When I started teaching a quarter of a century ago, this was still largely the lay of the land, but no longer. In recent years the two parties have become increasingly polarized. Although there is still a dwindling number of pro-life Democrats, the party leadership has deliberately marginalized them. Those who persist in maintaining their convictions on this issue find themselves unable to advance within its ranks. Even Democrats for Life America is compelled to pose this question on its website: "Can you be pro-life in a pro-choice party?" Although Catholics and Southern Baptists were once integral components of the Democratic coalition, the current secularizing leadership has pulled the party in a direction that would have been unthinkable to Franklin Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.

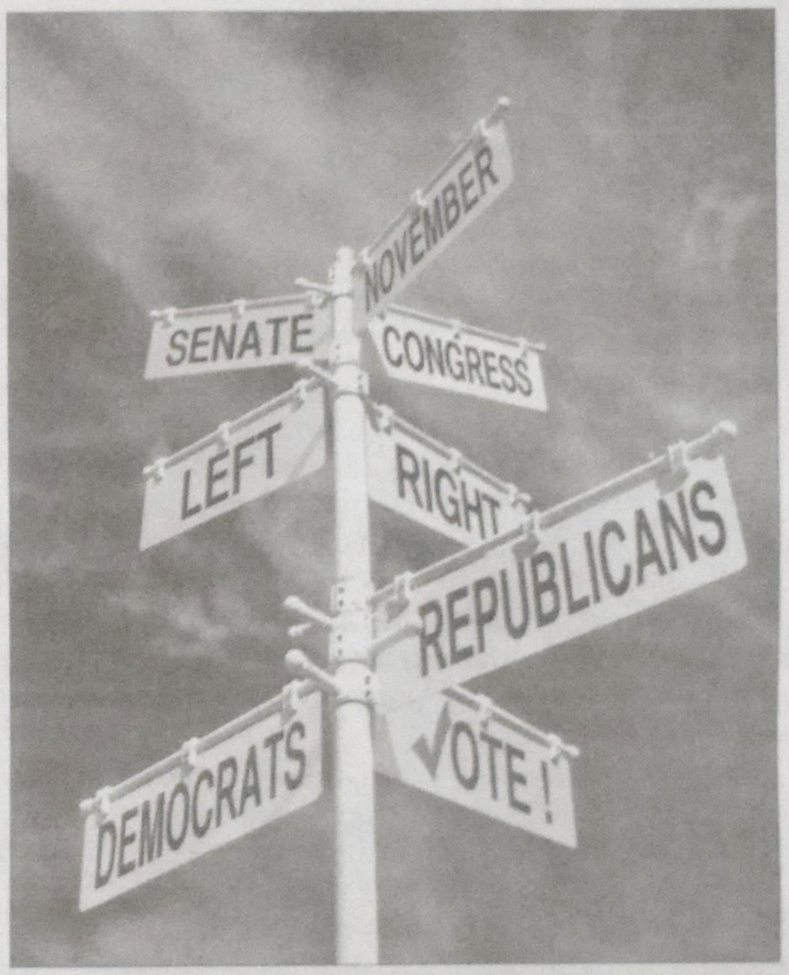
Sensing that the Democratic Party was moving away from the American mainstream, the Republican Party successfully reached out to these two core groups in the 1980s, thereby adding the so-called "Reagan Democrats" to its own support base. The Republicans looked set to establish their own dynasty for years to come, capitalizing on the missteps of the opposition. With the current administration's attack on the religious freedom of faith-based organizations, this should be the Republicans' year. But things may not turn out that way.

Diverging platforms

Although the libertarian component had always been part of the Republican coalition, it has gained more visibility with the Tea Party in recent years. As Mitt Romney was poised to become his party's standard bearer last month, he chose as his vice-presidential candidate Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, who has Tea Party support. Ryan once professed to be heavily influenced by Russian-American author Ayn Rand, who wrote a book called *The Virtue of Selfishness*. An atheist and avowed opponent of altruism, she championed the individual over the community, as seen in her novels, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, which have a cult following amongst North American libertarians. Rand's preferred social ethic would see a minimal state at best, along with a strict laissez-faire economy. From her perspective, the welfare state is not just ineffective and expensive; it is immoral.

Sad to say, polarization has brought out the worst elements in both parties. The Democrats seem to be controlled by those who misunderstand the comprehensive claims of religious faith, narrowing freedom of religion to a mere freedom of worship. The Republicans appear to be flirting with social Darwinists who believe in survival of the fittest. Not a pretty picture.

Yet there is more here than meets the eye. Both parties accept the historic liberal preference for individualism and voluntarism. One defends the right of individuals to follow their own personal and sexual preferences, even at the expense of institutions with stricter internal membership standards. The other believes the individual should pursue his or her own economic goals, even at the expense of the commons. If Democrats and Republicans are indeed polarized, it is not, after all, over basic principles; it is over who has rightful title to those principles.



Are Americans being torn apart politically?

I will not presume to predict a winner in November, but I will predict that there will be no happily ever after.

David T. Koyzis teaches politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont., and has recently completed a book manuscript on authority, office and the image of God.

Letter *continued*

are inadequate at some point. Despite deep disagreements about evolution in the CRC, our areas of commonality in faith are far greater than we too often dare to acknowledge.

Or is there a still deeper foundational issue about the authority of Scripture? That may be. We have never discussed that personally. You do not deal with that extensively in *Not Sure*, though I AM sure that your interpretations of certain sections of Scripture are not shared by all colleagues. I know I am in that club too. Regardless, I accept Scripture as infallible and authoritative, provided we profoundly search and respect what Scripture first meant to say to its original hearers and readers according to its genre. For a dandy example of this kind of rigorous text-honouring scholarship – though you've probably read it – I recommend to all readers John H. Walton's *Lost World of Genesis 1* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2009). I should think I'd find you in that line of biblical thought, but perhaps you have other things to think and say of which I am not aware.

So in conclusion, John, I'd love to invite you back. I also realize that's impossible. Yet I want you to know that I do not think you have jumped ship. The CRC is not a ship; the Church is the ship. And we all have royal class staterooms, royal not by virtue of our confessions, creeds, ministries, lives or enterprises, but by the mysterious and wide reaching mercy and grace of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit (and maybe more, as Neal Plantinga once speculated in class that God may have chosen not to reveal to us [*Not Sure*, p. 175]).

I wish you God's richest blessings as you continue your calling as pastor in the United Church of Canada. Irrespective of what some think, the UCC is part of the Body of Christ, one royal stateroom on God's ship. I can never forget that the UCC provided a home for many Dutch immigrants who were members of the *Hervormde Kerk* in the Netherlands. I'm not saying the CRC and UCC will ever be one official denomination as the Protestant Churches in the Netherlands are now; I don't even wish that. But I will let God figure that one out. Meanwhile, I miss you, Brother John and remain

Your brother, in Christ ALONE,
Jim Dekker

James C. Dekker is pastor of Covenant CRC in St. Catharines and has been believing and doubting and believing and believing some more for most of his 64 and a half years on earth and 35 years in the ministry.

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Editorials

We are all strangers

Angela Reitsma Bick

Mom, what's that building?

"Well, it's a place for the workers to sleep. They're just here for the summer, so it's kind of like . . . camping."

Oh.

Why are they over there?

"Well, we're picking a few berries to eat, and they're picking a whole bunch, for markets and grocery stores."

Oh.

Do they want a ride on the tractor too?

The OSJ suggests:

"In your pre-meal prayers, pray for the welfare and protection of those who are made vulnerable in order to make such a meal possible."

– from the CRC's Office of Social Justice, Lenten Devotion

We're all getting pretty good at talking about food. In fact, it's become something of a national past-time. CBC radio's phone-in show this afternoon asked listeners for their thoughts on the 100-kilometre diet. Coming soon: is this tomato genetically modified? Environmentally sustainable? Fair trade?

Thanks to celebrity cookbooks, the Food Network and foodie blogs, we are all increasingly familiar with endless new models for what to eat and how it should be grown.

A gap in our knowledge remains, however, and it has to do with the harvest. Although the global fair trade movement has successfully improved the lives of some farmers in the developing world, temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in our own communities do not always earn a fair wage. And their unsafe working conditions don't make the news, either, until tragedy strikes – as it did August 16, when Ezequiel Cervantes-Nava was killed by a direct lightning bolt in a ginseng field near London, Ontario. A few days later, the disaster slid off the front page and our collective radar.

But I see these quiet pickers in the rows next to me when we get strawberries. I see them in the onion fields of Holland Marsh when we whiz by on the 400 highway to Toronto. My daughter sees them bending low to hoist buckets of blueberries and wonders if they want a ride on the tractor. I wonder too.

An invisible workforce

Imagine that you get there at 4:30 a.m. Long aisles of dark earth alternate with rows of straw – actually the dried tops of garlic plants. The sun brightens the horizon as you kneel in the dirt and pull out the first handful of plants. You whack the bunch clean, then with a series of rapid-fire snips, you sever roots and stalks. Garlic heads tumble into your bucket.

You move down the row, adjust the pail. When it's full it will weigh 25 pounds. You'll pick 12 buckets today, earning $1.60 per pail. By the end of the first week, your thighs will be covered in bruises, your hands in blisters. The 300 pounds of garlic you pick today will be packed in crates and shipped to a central producer.

Eventually it will be sold at Walmart in netted sleeves for $3.38 each, giving those original 12 buckets a retail value of $1,014. Meanwhile, you earned just over $19 for nine hours of work.

These details are adapted from a recent book called *The American Way of Eating* by Tracie McMillan (Scribner, 2012). McMillan, a freelance journalist, went "undercover" as a labourer picking grapes, peaches and garlic in California's central valley. Her mission was to understand contemporary food systems: in part, how produce moves from farm to store. The resulting exposé doesn't set out to illuminate the lives and working conditions of TFWs, but their longsuffering comes through clearly.

McMillan discovers systemic injustice in the way foreign workers are treated. "[They] don't earn enough money, the contractors cheat them, and they don't like being in the fields next to crop dusters" (96). Her own pay cheque, when it arrives, reimburses her for picking 12 buckets of garlic: $19.20. The pay stub, however, indicates that the wages are hourly rather than per pail. Her nine hours ignored, on paper she only worked two and half hours, in order to comply with labour laws that mandate a minimum wage of eight dollars an hour. This small duplicity confirms her concerns.

'When did we see you hungry?'

"The Christian Reformed Church in North America was born," as the 2010 Synod report on migration points out, "within a community of immigrants." The report goes on to show how the CRC has been strengthened by welcoming "strangers" from the Netherlands (in the 1950s), Cuba ('60s), Southeast Asia ('70s), West Africa ('80s) and Korea (today). It urges us to educate ourselves about the lives of recent immigrants and foreign workers, to minister to them and to speak out against the inequality they face.

"The strangers in our midst represent opportunities both to discern the presence of Jesus," the report concludes, "and to act as Jesus in the name of the God who long ago told his people Israel that they were to love strangers because God loved them."

In other words, I should hop off the tractor. There's all kinds of work to do.

Angela Reitsma Bick has returned as Editor of Christian Courier *after a year's maternity leave. She appreciates every question her daughters ask, even the ones she can't answer.*

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Legislative injustice

Alfredo Barahona

Have you ever considered what it's like to be a temporary foreign worker (TFW) in Canada? Did you know that TFWs can legally be paid 15 percent less than Canadian citizens, thanks to changes in the recent federal government budget?

It can be argued that Canada was built by migrant labour, and there is no doubt that today's temporary foreign workers play an indispensable part in the nation's economy. But notwithstanding their economic importance, migrant workers have historically been denied basic human rights and citizenship. Legislation that was part of the Conservative's federal budget this spring will only make things worse.

Year after year, tens of thousands of migrant workers quietly enter Canada to do the jobs most people don't want. They work in fields and orchards, in meat processing plants and on construction sites. These workers travel thousands of miles from home, leaving loved ones behind. Many young children in Mexico, Guatemala, the Caribbean, Thailand and the Philippines – to name just a few places where migrant workers are from – do not see their mothers or fathers for eight months or more. And this is almost tolerable when compared to the children of migrant workers in other sectors of the economy, such as live-in caregivers for children, the elderly and the disabled, who can be separated from their families for years.

Migrant workers pay a high price to earn a living in Canada.

Temporary foreign workers have few rights and limited benefits. While in Canada they have essentially no access to services and are completely dependent on their employers for such things as housing, healthcare, and even basic information about their rights.

Biased labour laws

In February the Institute for Research on Public Policy issued a study by Professor Jenna Hennebry of Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. Professor Hennebry interviewed 600 Ontario farm workers. Many told her they had difficulty accessing health care and were often exposed to dangerous pesticides and fertilizers without proper protection.

On its web site, Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) mentions reports from workers about 12-15 hour days with no overtime or holiday pay; substandard housing with inadequate washroom facilities; overt racism; and pay discrimination between migrant and non-migrant workers.

Most migrant workers cannot claim residency despite extensive years of work in Canada. Many are excluded from basic human rights legislation, and are not allowed to join unions.

Migrant workers pay taxes, and they contribute to social programs that they may never use, including the Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance. Recent estimates indicate that TFWs and their employers contributed as much as $303 million over 12 months in employment insurance premiums in 2008 alone (**focal.ca**).

Unfortunately, instead of addressing these problems, the federal budget made changes to the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) that will cause further harm. Making it legal to pay TFWs up to 15 percent less than the average wage will encourage hiring more TFWs. In fact, migrant workers argue that the Government of Canada is using this policy to legitimize and foster inequality in how they are treated by employers.

See **Legislative injustice** *on page 3*

God's instrument: John Prinzen

On Jan 7, 2012 John Prinzen left his earthly life and passed into eternity. We will not see him again until our own deaths or until Jesus comes again. In the days following his death, in conversations with each other and more formally in the funeral service, we were reminded again of the significant impact John and his wife Siny had not only on their family and friends but on the society they were so much a part of. People talked about his work with The Children's Aid Society, Child and Adolescent Services, Dawn Patrol Group Homes and Homestead Christian Homes.

We talked about the great hospitality John and Siny showed to all who entered their beautiful home and of their wonderful homemade wines. However, I missed the mention of the greatest impact he had on my life. I'm sure it will resonate with many readers of *Christian Courier*, or *Calvinist Contact*, as it was when my story starts.

Always avid readers of the *Calvinist Contact*, my late husband and I used to chuckle about some of its ads. Along with the ever-present garlic ad, there was usually an ad for the Christian Marriage Contact Bureau. At that time I had no idea who ran it or that it would someday be very significant in my life. Many years later, long after Dave had died and our son had left to continue his schooling, I decided to answer that ad. I felt ready for a new life partner and, taking a deep breath, I wrote to the address included with the ad. Shortly after I received a package with the profiles of a number of single men. I wrote to a few and had spent some time with one of them. Then John took a more direct, personal approach. He sent a letter with a single profile and a short note saying "I know this man personally and I think you'd like him." Later, I realized he had done the same thing with the man in question.

Ton and I have been happily married for 16 years. God has blessed us in so many ways. As I write these words, many scenes of blessing pass before my eyes but this is not our story, it's about John and his impact on our lives. We will be forever grateful to him and also to *CC* which was another instrument God used in our lives. I'm sure there are many, many more stories such as ours. If you and your family have been influenced by John Prinzen, why not write your story and send it to *CC* as well? I'm sure Siny and their children would enjoy more stories about how John has blessed people.

Trish Smith Lobert
Burlington, ON

Editor's note: CC received this letter in March, but it was lost due to an error on our part. We offer our sincere apologies for the printing delay to Trish Smith Lobert and to Siny Prinzen. Readers who knew John are invited to send their memories to editor@christiancourier.ca

Changing of the guard again

Wow, another editorial *CC* year has come and gone. Last September, our intrepid editor Angela went on maternity leave. She exchanged the computer for a brand new baby: Benjamin. At that time, Michael Buma, an instructor of modern literature at the University of Western Ontario, accepted the position of interim editor of *CC*. And what a great job he has done.

The transition was seamless, and he made it look as if he had done this kind of work since Dick Farenhorst was editor in the 1960s. His copy-editing skills were strong, his editorials were thought-provoking and challenging and he opened a few windows that had not been opened before, i.e., his position at a university, his understanding of sport and the Christian faith, and his review of books that meant a lot to him. The board of *Christian Courier* wants to heartily thank Michael for his love for Christian journalism, for his dedication to promoting a Kingdom perspective in various areas of life, and for encouraging other young minds to join the efforts of those pioneers who started this Christian witness to the redeeming powers of the gospel in our Canadian context. Thank you Michael!

And so, with this first issue of September, we welcome back Angela Reitsma Bick, who will pick up the computer (and keep the baby) while once again taking charge of the editorial responsibilities at *Christian Courier*. May God give her strength and vision for the coming years.

On behalf of the board of Reformed Faith Witness, the publisher of *CC*,
Gary Van Eyk, chair

Graphic designer joins CC

The board of Reformed Faith Witness is pleased to welcome Nicole Vandenberg to the staff of *Christian Courier* September 1. Vandenberg has a passion for connecting generations and a vision for how to broaden *CC*'s visual appeal.

Nicole Vandenberg is a freelance graphic designer based in Norval, Ontario. Following a degree from Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, she worked as a graphic designer in Canada's natural health food industry before returning to school to pursue studies in fibre art and apparel construction at Haliburton School of The Arts and George Brown College, both in Haliburton and Toronto, Ontario. Vandenberg enjoys her post-student life as an avid visual artist, gardener, cook and world traveler.

'Just war' has to be defensive

In his response to my letter to the editor, Jonathan de Vries concludes "Thus we have the dilemma, to which there are no easy biblical or philosophical answers, of whether limited warfare in the present is justified to prevent the increased possibility of the use of nuclear weapons in the future" (August 13, *CC*).

De Vries seems to suggest that preventive warfare still falls within the just war theory. It does not! The theory is only "valid" if a war is waged defensively. The CRC has accepted the just war theory but De Vries does not adhere to it. Like the just war theory, De Vries has nothing prophetic to say about warfare.

Bert den Boggende
Brooks, AB

Honoured by the Queen

Have you or someone you know received one of Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee Medals? These commemorative medals are being handed out across the country to mark the 60th anniversary of the Queen's reign. Medal recipients have made significant contributions to life within Canada, or achievements abroad that "bring credit to Canada."

We know our subscribers are among those community leaders, mentors, entrepreneurs and volunteers being recognized throughout 2012. Send your story to Angela Reitsma Bick at editor@christiancourier.ca.

Legislative injustice *continued*

Temporary workers and their families already pay a high price to earn a living in Canada. Migrant workers are essential for the country's labour needs, but by offering opportunities for temporary migration only, Canada marginalizes these mostly racialized workers.

Importing workers on temporary contracts does not reflect Canadian values of fairness and justice. Instead of focusing on filling long-term labour needs with TFWs who do not enjoy the same rights and protections as other workers, Canada should be nation-building and bringing in workers as permanent residents.

Canada must ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Canada also should sign on to the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention on Domestic Work. Adopted in July 2011, it recognizes domestic work as "work," and bestows upon domestic workers the same rights and recognition as other workers, including the enforcement of minimum wage, regular working hours and holidays, the provision of health and other benefits, and the right to organize and form unions.

KAIROS, a Canadian faith-based ecumenical organization effecting social change through advocacy, education and research – which includes the Christian Reformed Church as one of its members – is concerned with how the TFWP will impact negatively on the dignity and human rights of workers and their families. Rooted in the theological principle of welcoming the stranger, faith communities believe that all workers, including migrant workers, deserve to be treated with fairness and equity.

Alfredo Barahona is the KAIROS Migrant Justice Program Coordinator. He lives in Toronto.

Christian Courier

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EFC report: Suppression of Canadian abortion data obstructs democracy

OTTAWA (LifeSiteNews.com) – Gaping holes in Canadian abortion data, and the surreptitious passage of legislation in Ontario saying that the public may no longer obtain abortion data – even through a Freedom of Information request – is nothing other than the "obstruction" of democracy, according to a new report by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC).

In the past, "we've heard it from the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario to the bench of the Supreme Court of Canada: access to information facilitates democracy," says Faye Sonier, legal counsel with the EFC. Now, "to block access to information is to purposefully obstruct Canadians from being able to fully participate in the democratic process; and permits politicians to carry on, without accountability to voters," Sonier says.

The EFC's legal counsel.

The EFC report, "Black Holes: Canada's Missing Abortion Data," details the abortion-data-blocking amendments to Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) that came into effect on January 1, 2012. The report concludes that there is a nation-wide trend of the suppression of reporting of data on Canadian abortion procedures.

In May, pro-life activists discovered that the amendment to FIPPA was silently slipped in as part of a larger bill entitled "An Act to increase the financial accountability of organizations in the broader public sector." Part VIII of the 2010 Bill 122 amended FIPPA so that the act "does not apply to records relating to the provision of abortion services." Bill 122 received Royal Assent in December 2010 and came into effect in January of this year.

Questions government motives

Transcripts from the Ontario parliament appear to have no record of debate on the issue of restricting access to abortion data in the province. EFC vice-president Don Hutchinson questions the tactics used by the Ontario Liberal government, as well as their motives. "In response to recent questioning by the media, government spokespersons stated the amendment was necessary because abortion-related information is 'highly sensitive.'

"What does 'highly sensitive' mean and what are its limits? Does the government of Ontario think some topics are too difficult for the electorate to consider? Is knowing the number of abortions performed in the province more intrusive than knowing the number of mastectomies or prostate removals? Do they really think, as was suggested, the release of general statistical data might lead to someone getting hurt?"

The EFC report takes issue with the government's claim that not releasing the data is in the best interests of the public, and that such information might cause women seeking abortions to be afraid of "attack, harassment, or threats." However, the EFC observes that there have not been any instances of violence related to the abortion issue in the past decade.

Faye Sonier points out that pro-lifers are only requesting access to "generalized data" anyway, rather than data about specific individuals or abortion facilities. "In the words of senior adjudicator David Goodis, 'To deny access to generalized, non-identifying statistics regarding an important public policy issue such as the provision of abortion services would have the effect of hindering citizens' ability to participate meaningfully in the democratic process and undermine the government's accountability to the public,'" said the EFC legal counsellor.

Nation-wide black-out

The suppression of abortion data extended to the entire country with the release on April 17 of the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) report on induced abortions performed in Canada for 2010. That information appears to show a significant drop in abortions from the previous year. According to the 2009 report, 93,755 children were aborted that year, with 30,268 abortions performed in Ontario and 27,139 in Quebec. The 2010 report indicated that a total of 64,641 abortions were carried out in Canada, with 28,765 performed in Ontario. However, the 2010 report had no abortion data at all for the province of Quebec, and there were gaping holes in the data for all other provinces.

"If one adds in all of the mitigating factors in the CIHI statistics and totals up all of the under and unreported estimates, Canada's abortion rate could be well over an astounding 150,000," says pro-life activist John Hof. "Even when records were kept more diligently by Statistics Canada, we never went over 120,000. For them to now say Canada only had 64,641 abortions in 2010 is laughable to the extreme."

The same government funds health care for preemies and late-term abortions.

The full text of the EFC report is available at **evangelicalfellowship.ca.**

CMA: Babies not human until after birth

OTTAWA (LSN) – The CMA, the largest association of physicians in Canada, voted on August 15 to support the wording of the Criminal Code which states that a baby becomes a "human being" only after being born.

The motion passed by delegates to the Canadian Medical Association's annual general council was: "A resolution supporting the current wording of the Criminal Code which states that a child 'becomes a human being within the meaning of this Act when it has completely proceeded, in a living state, from the body of its mother....'"

The reaction from Canadian Physicians for Life said, "Every Canadian doctor knows that the unborn child is a live human being." Dr. Will Johnston, the group's president, noted, "CMA delegates worry about children not exercising enough or not wearing bicycle helmets while over one hundred thousand children go missing from our playgrounds every year because they were killed by abortion. The mismatch between this problem and [the] conversation from the CMA annual general meeting defies parody."

Pro-life physician Johnson says the definition goes against what every doctor knows.

Denying biological reality

Pro-life Toronto physician John Shea said the CMA delegates should be "ashamed of themselves for failing to recognize when human life begins. The biological fact is what counts here, which is when the ovum and the sperm unite, a single-celled human organism is formed. Period. This organism is a human being, a person at the single-cell stage. From that point in time he or she has rights. Anybody who denies that fact is denying biological reality; they are lying."

Conservative MP Steve Woodworth filed a motion in the House of Commons last February to establish a special committee to consider when human life begins. He called for Parliament to re-examine Section 223 of the Code. Pro-life groups nationwide rejoiced in Woodworth's motion, hoping it might provide a foundation to offer protection to unborn children. Dr. Johnston calls Section 223 "our profession's biggest shame and biggest headache. It is a disastrous public policy which does far more harm than good."

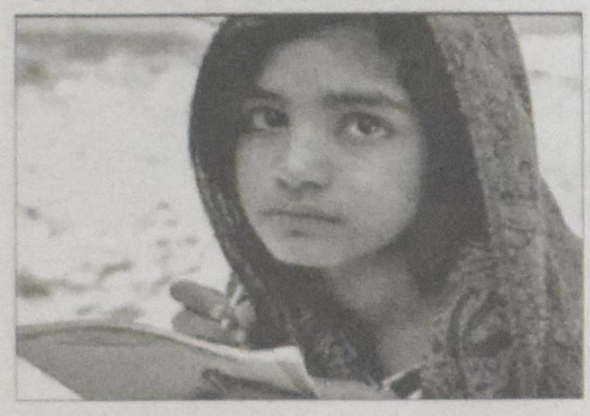
Jim Hughes, president of Campaign Life Coalition, said this, "just shows the sorry state of the leaders of the CMA who have drifted so far from the oath of Hippocrates." The 1500-year-old Hippocratic Oath was, until recently, sworn to by all who practice the healing arts and can be summed up in in phrase, "First, do no harm." At one point, oath-takers would specifically swear that they will not give a woman medicaments to "cause an abortion."

Prime Minister Harper pledged to vote against the motion when it comes up, calling it "unfortunate" that the motion was deemed votable by an all-party committee of the House. Voting on Woodworth's motion has been postponed until the fall.

News

Pakistan: Down's syndrome child arrested for blasphemy

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (CCO/Asia News) – An 11-year-old Christian girl with Down's syndrome was arrested in late August for allegedly violating Pakistan's blasphemy law.



The arrest of the mentally disabled Rimsha Masih has sparked angry protests among Christians and human-rights activists. But a Roman Catholic representative of Pakistan's ruling cabinet urged calm, insisting, "We will have positive developments soon."

The girl was arrested after her family's Muslim neighbors complained that she had burned several pages from a book used in teaching Arabic. The book contains verses from the Qu'ran. The girl was also said to have thrown the the pages into the garbage inside a plastic bag.

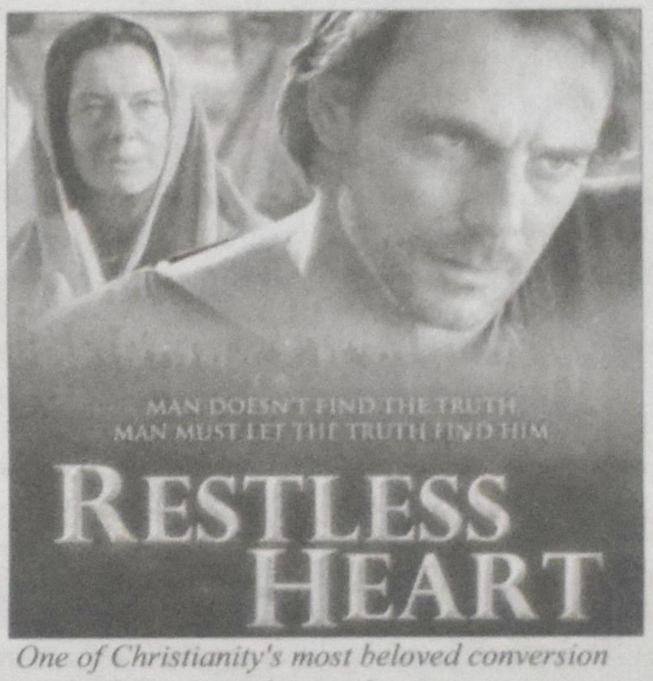
Paul Bhatti, who advises the Pakistani government regarding religious minorities, said that the girl had no intention of insulting Islam, and noted that her mental disability should be taken into account.

Nevertheless, Rimsha Masih was taken into police custody after an angry Muslim crowd of several hundred people gathered around her family's home in a poor section of Islamabad, threatening to "do the same" to the Christian community there as what Rimsha purportedly did to the pages containing the Qu'ran verses. A witness told Vatican Radio that the girl might have been physically attacked if the police had not promptly intervened.

While stressing the girl's innocence, Paul Bhatti – whose brother Shahbaz Bhatti was assassinated in March 2011 because of his criticism of Pakistan's blasphemy law – complained that some Christians had aggravated the situation. In Bhatti's view, they increased tensions between Muslims and Christians by their inflamed protests and inaccurate accounts of the incident. He also scolded human-rights groups for exploiting "Christian suffering" to advance their own causes.

According to Human Rights Monitor 2011, the annual report by the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) of the Catholic Church of Pakistan, at least 40 people were charged with blasphemy in the country in 2010, including 15 Christians, 10 Muslims and six Ahmadis. The so-called "black law" has led to the murder of 37 people (18 Christians and 16 Muslims), mostly in extrajudicial executions. From 1986, when the law came into effect, to 2010, there were 1,081 people charged with blasphemy (138 Christians, 468 Muslims and 454 Ahmadis).

St. Augustine premiers on the big screen



One of Christianity's most beloved conversion stories is now a major movie.

DENVER, Colorado (CNA) – "Restless Heart," a feature film about the famous early church father and theologian Augustine of Hippo, commonly known as St. Augustine, is now available for sponsored theatrical screenings across the U.S. and Canada.

The film's distributor, Ignatius Press, is encouraging individuals, churches, church groups or other organizations to bring the film to their towns. Interested groups and individuals should work with local theaters and other venues to book a screen. Ignatius Press says it will provide a copy of the film and a complete promotional kit for "an affordable fee." The movie will not a have theatrical release, as such. However, the sponsorship program will allow it to be shown in theaters from now through early November.

"We are thrilled to bring 'Restless Heart' to the big screen," says Mark Brumley, president of Ignatius Press. Augustine's story is "inspiring and compelling," and his writings are "among the most respected in the world even today." The $20-million (US) movie was directed by Christian Duguay. It stars Alessandro Preziosi as Augustine.

St. Augustine was the author of numerous sermons and books, including his "Confessions," the famous account of his childhood and his life as a scholar and bishop in the fourth century Roman Empire. His soul-searching descriptions of his lamented sins and his conversion to Christianity have inspired millions of others throughout the centuries. Brumley says the movie is "the most moving story of conversion and reconciliation ever brought to the big screen."

The film's title, "Restless Heart," comes from what is perhaps Augustine's most famous and often-quoted confession of faith, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (*Confessions*, Bk. 1).

Egypt: Christians beaten, stores looted after Muslim call to kill Copts

CAIRO, Egypt (CWN) – Coptic Christians began to come under attack in mid-August in towns in southern Egypt hours after a call for their eradication appeared in the form of leaflets calling on Muslims to kill Copts.

An August 14 report by Fady Talaat for *Al Akhbar News* has the details. In the village of Al Gallaweya, Sohag, Christians are being beaten, their stores destroyed and their properties plundered. The attackers are declaring that "any Christian who dares to leave his house will be killed." The Copts are protesting that police arrive only after the damage has been completely done.

Nageh Hozar, one of the attacked victims who was hospitalized, said that Mo'tassem Sedky Rashwan, a known felon who is also a fugitive living in the village, came to a supermarket owned by the victim's brother, Fady Hozar. Rashwan took cigarettes and refused to pay for them. Instead, he asked Fady to pay him EGP 50 as "tribute." When the latter refused they had a dispute. Rashwan then left and came back with his brothers, some cousins and friends. Zaki explained that the whole gang started beating him, his own two brothers, Thomas and Fady Hozar, and several other men, using sticks and canes. Some of the men were severely injured.

More violence in Egypt as Muslims target Coptic Christians.

The Muslims further set four Coptic stores on fire and looted housands of dollars worth of merchandise. They attacked and robbed the owners' houses and even stole store ownership contracts. The gang further destroyed one car and three motorcycles, and systematically damaged the doors of homes belonging to Christians in the village.

No justice for Christians

Zaki stated that their persecutors warned Christians from leaving their homes, promising death to whoever dared try. They said they did not want to see a single Christian in the street, which made many Christians lock themselves in. Zaki asserted that in spite of the police presence in the village, Christians cannot go out because they are surrounded by criminals with machine guns. Zaki also stated that the police always came too late when called, and none of the perpetrators was arrested. Instead, the police arrested three Christians for investigation even before their treatment was complete in the hospital. "Whatever happened to justice?" Zaki wondered.

According to another *Al Akhbar News* report, on August 14 "hundreds of Christians gathered before the Asyut Security Directorate in Manfalut Municipality, demanding that police protect them, their children, and houses from a gang attacking their homes and imposing tributes on them."

In the town of Abdul-Rasul, a gang led by two Muslims (Mustafa al-Sissi and Mustafa al-Asmar) "kidnapped the son of a Coptic Christian and did not release him until his family paid a ransom of 3,000 EGP." Most recently, the same Muslim gang "attacked the house of Romani Murad al-Gawli [another Copt], releasing several gunshots in the air and threatening him either to 'pay or die.'" The attackers chose this town "because Copts form 80 percent of its inhabitants," according to the report.

The report concludes with a familiar note: "After numerous calls for help" and after "filing several reports in vain," the Christian villagers decided to demonstrate.

Columns

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang

What, then?

Late at night on August 6, we watched NASA's *Curiosity* rover descend to the surface of Mars. It wasn't a televised event, so we had to plug the laptop into the big screen to get the feed from NASA's website. We weren't alone in going to all that trouble.

All across North America, some 3.2 million viewers did exactly what we were doing that night – they woke sleeping children out of their beds, they made popcorn, and they watched a robot the size of a small car land on a planet some 225 million kilometers away. I can't speak for the millions of other people watching that night, but there are two reasons why I find Mars so fascinating.

The first has to do with the original robotic mission to Mars – the *Viking* landers – which touched down on the red planet when I was eight years old. And, while they were primitive by today's standards, the *Viking* landers gave us the first pictures of the surface of Mars – which is about as barren and hostile as the desert landscape around Las Vegas.

The second reason I've always been interested in Mars has to do with C.S. Lewis. While many people have read his Narnia books, not nearly so many have read his "Cosmic Trilogy" series, which begins with the novel *Out of the Silent Planet.* I first read it when I was twelve years old, and have been thinking about it ever since.

In the book, an Englishman named Dr. Elwin Ransom is kidnapped by two corrupt human scientists. He's taken to Mars, where his fellow humans plan to sacrifice him to the inhabitants of the planet. He escapes, and becomes friends with the Martians – who turn out to be gentle, and wise. Eventually, all three earthlings are brought before the ruling spirit of the planet to answer for their presence on Mars, and for the death they have brought with them.

The series – like all of Lewis's writing – is highly allegorical. And, as it turns out, scientifically inaccurate. That's mostly because *Out of the Silent Planet* was published in 1938 – at a time when people still thought it possible that Mars had canals, a breathable atmosphere and could support life.

Creation includes the cosmos

But, just as Viking got me excited about the **science** of space exploration, Lewis got me thinking about the **theology** of space exploration. And, while it seems to me we've gained a great deal of scientific knowledge in recent years about Mars, Titan and other neighbours in our solar system, we haven't gotten very far in considering what it might mean for Christianity if we actually found life on one of these worlds.

That, in my opinion, is the exciting thing about Lewis's books. Not only did one of history's foremost Christian apologists take the subject of life on other planets seriously, he found a way to make it fit together with Christian beliefs. Of course, to many modern readers, Lewis's belief that life on other planets is not only possible but probable seems very strange.

We're not used to Christians who talk like that. These days, we have more information at our fingertips than any other generation, but at the same time we are more entrenched in dogmatic positions of belief than ever before. The battle lines are clear: on one side, liberals and science. On the other, conservatives and God. On one side, people who want science taught in the classrooms. On the other, people who want equal time for creationism. And while they could not be further apart in what they believe, they are identical in how they communicate – they're

NASA admin Bolden closes his eyes as rover descends.

both harsh, rude and confrontational. In short, neither side is out to learn anything. They're out to be right. And they're not interested in finding common ground.

That's not the approach Lewis took to science. In an essay called "Religion and Rocketry," written in 1958, Lewis put it this way:

"Each new discovery, even every new theory, is held at first to have the most wide-reaching theological and philosophical consequences. It is seized by unbelievers as the basis for a new attack on Christianity; it is often, and more embarrassingly, seized by injudicious believers as the basis for a new defense.

"But usually, when the popular hubbub has subsided and the novelty has been chewed over by real theologians, real scientists and real philosophers, both sides find themselves pretty much where they were before. So it was with Copernican astronomy, with Darwinism, with biblical criticism, with the new psychology. So, I cannot help expecting, it will be with the discovery of 'life on other planets' if that discovery is ever made."

In the highly polarized, politicized and toxic contemporary discussion about the relationship between faith and science, Lewis's words seem completely out of place. But as science reveals more of God's cosmic creation to us, we're fast approaching a point when we may need to dust his ideas off again.

What will we say, as Christians, should simple life forms be found in the soil of our nearest neighbour? Or if we discover that the famous "Drake Equation" is true and that, among the billions upon billions of habitable planets in the universe, we somehow discover intelligent life – what then?

Lewis considered that as well. For him, the question was not "would our theology survive such an encounter," but rather "would another species survive such an encounter with us?" He wrote:

"I therefore fear the practical, not the theoretical, problems which will arise if ever we meet rational creatures which are not human. Against them we shall, if we can, commit all the crimes we have already committed against creatures certainly human but differing from us in features and pigmentation."

All of this is academic, of course. We haven't discovered life, elsewhere, yet.

So, for now, we can continue to look up at the night sky in wonder, and continue to ask "what if" – until the day come that we must ask "what, now?"

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville, Ont.

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman

Of men and Martians

As I write, NASA's Martian rover, aptly named *Curiosity*, is beaming back detailed images of the Martian landscape. Its landing was dramatic. After deploying a parachute, a jet-powered platform gently lowered the rover by cable to the surface of Mars. The NASA ground control technicians waited with baited breath for the first radio signal to arrive indicating the safe landing of the rover – a 14 minute delay because of the vast distance. Shortly after landing, detailed images of an alien world were received, bearing a strange resemblance to a desert on earth. *Curiosity* is supposed to determine if life ever existed on Mars.

People have speculated this before, of course. In the 1800s, Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli peered through his telescope and observed what he thought were seas and channels on the Martian surface. Percival Lowell was inspired by these Martian observations and popularized the notion of an ancient civilization on Mars in a series of books.

With the dawn of space exploration in the 1960s, more pictures of Mars were captured, but there were no visible signs of life. Curiosity about the red planet, however, has persisted. In the mid-1970s, the Viking probes carried out experiments on Martian soil looking for evidence of microorganisms. One of the experiments appeared to suggest life, but most people regarded this as a false positive. In 1984, a meteorite that may have originated from Mars was found in Antarctica and some of its microscopic features were conjectured to be fossils of extraterrestrial life. Although the discovery prompted a televised announcement by Bill Clinton, many remain skeptical of the claims.

'Arena of our hopes and fears'

Mars has captured the imagination of many authors over the years. A notable example is H.G. Wells' 1898 book, *The War of the Worlds,* which tells of Martians who leave their dying planet to invade Earth. In 1938, the book was adapted to a dramatic radio play by Orson Welles. During its radio broadcast, many people began to panic, assuming it was a newscast and the Martian invasion was actually underway. Since then, Mars has inspired many science fiction writers. Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* tells of human colonization on Mars and the resulting conflict with the natives. C.S. Lewis wrote a novel, *Out of the Silent Planet,* mostly set on the planet Mars (known to its inhabitants as "Malacandra").

Mars has also inspired numerous movies and cartoons. Perhaps the earliest was a series of Flash Gordon films in 1938: these depict Flash's trip to Mars, where he foils the take-over-Earth plans of the Queen of Mars. Since then, a near-regular stream of movies about Mars has been produced, ranging from the action-packed remakes (*War of the Worlds*) to silly films (*Mars Need Moms*). And of course, who can forget Marvin the Martian, the little Looney Tunes character? Those who are familiar with the cartoons will no doubt recall Marvin's famous reply to Bugs Bunny's antics: "you have made me very angry, very angry indeed."

The rover's view before and after a dust cover is removed from its camera lens.

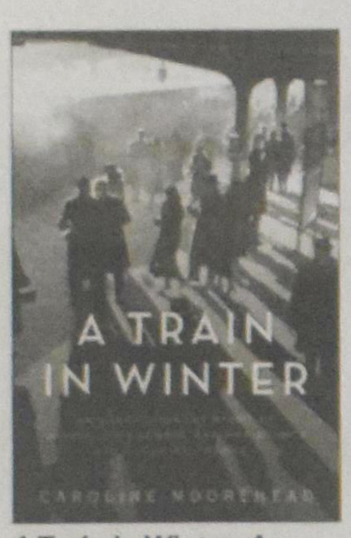
The Mars of our cultural imagination may be fuelling NASA's current mission to find life there.

What is it about the possibility of life on Mars that has captured the imaginations of scientists, novelists and cartoonists alike? Is the ongoing search for extraterrestrial life a spiritual quest for meaning?

In the words of Carl Sagan, "Mars has become a kind of mythic arena onto which we have projected our Earthly hopes and fears." And what if life is found on Mars? I am not sure how to articulate a Christian perspective on extraterrestrial life, but I know I can say one thing: if there's life out there, God created it.

Dr. Derek Schuurman (dschuur@cs.redeemer.ca) is a computer science professor at Redeemer University College. In the past, his research has included experiments with mobile robots (although they were designed to roam the halls of Redeemer University College, not Mars).

Reviews



Love and survival in Auschwitz

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In 2008, Caroline Moorehead decided to go in search of the survivors of the 230 French women involved in the Resistance whom the Germans transported by train to Auschwitz, as well as the children and other relatives of those who did not survive. She tells the stories of how and why the women joined the Resistance, the means by which they were captured, what they experienced in captivity in the military fort of Romainville and, later, in Auschwitz, and what it was like for the 49 survivors to return to France after the war. All of this is framed within the context of the women's friendships, shedding light on how their close relationships helped them to survive.

A Train in Winter: An Extraordinary Story of Women, Friendship and Survival in World War Two
by Caroline Moorehead
Vintage Canada
Missasauga, ON: 2012

Moorehead expounds on her theme: "This is a book about friendship between women, and the importance that they attach to intimacy and to looking after each other, and about how, under conditions of acute hardship and danger, such mutual dependency can make the difference between living and dying. It is about courage, facing and surviving the worst that life can offer, with dignity and an unassailable determination not to be destroyed. Those who came back to France in 1945 owed their lives principally to chance, but they owed it too in no small measure to the tenacity with which they clung to one another, though separated by every division of class, age, religion, occupation, politics and education."

Long before the Germans marched into Paris on June 14, 1940, they had planned for the occupation of France by censoring the press, controlling the postal service and running the trains. French passivity and collaboration made the task easier. Moorehead points out that "it was against this background of collaboration and occupation that the early Resistance began to take shape." Individual acts of resistance soon grew into unified attacks against the enemy. Though the role of women in the Resistance hasn't always been highlighted, Moorehead asserts that "acting together or on their own, women of all ages and from all over France . . . generous-spirited and tough-minded, were about to play a crucial role." Who were these women? "Schoolgirls, mothers, grandmothers, housewives and professional women" joined the Resistance for different reasons, but ultimately because "they really had no choice"; they hated injustice and would not submit to it.

When the Germans arrested the women, how did their friendships help them to cope and allow them to survive in captivity? How did these women who "were on the side of life" live to share their stories?

Allow me to share several examples.

In Romainville, women who had experienced similar losses shared their stories with each other. Moorehead writes, "Grieving for their executed husbands, missing their children, fearful for their families, they talked, for there was not much else to do; and, as they talked, they felt stronger and better able to cope."

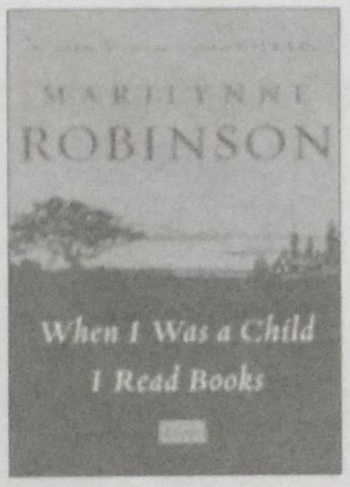
But talking wasn't the main factor that led to unity and friendship. Moorehead explains, "Perhaps most important for the cohesion of the women, a desire to learn, and to teach, spread among the dormitories. To fill the long days, to keep at bay memories of what had happened and fears for the future of children, an informal series of classes started up, each woman contributing her own experiences and skills." As they learned together, the women shared books that they had been able to take along with them. Those who loved theatre and had memorized plays initiated theatrical productions that breathed hope and creativity into their traumatic days.

On birthdays, the women shared small gifts from their meager personal belongings. At Christmas time, they joined forces to celebrate as best they could. Singing together strengthened spirits and the resolve to survive. The women exercised together, as well, because it made them feel they had not completely lost their identities. They shared any food that was available to them.

As the French women saw some of their friends die, their friendship grew even more intense. "They took pride in their closeness," Moorehead relates, "and the fact that they were as kind, helpful and polite towards one another as they would have been back at home." Ultimately, each woman "had come to regard her own survival as of no greater or lesser importance than the survival of any one of the others."

A Train in Winter is not easy reading due to its painful subject matter, but this reader has been enriched through the lives of the women she met on its pages and stirred by the power of friendship to enhance and sustain life.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyafv55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.



Robinson's latest explores the virtues of America's roots

Nick Loenen

Novelist and essayist Marilynne Robinson has a deep appreciation for old American hymns, the Puritans, John Calvin, the laws of Moses and the God of the Old Testament. One can only assume that she must be a champion of the religious right, right? Wrong!

When I Was a Child I Read Books
by Marilynne Robinson
Harper Collins Publishers
Scarborough, ON: 2012

Robinson wants America to return to its roots – the values, principles and institutions that have served it so well. In particular, she desires a spirit of generosity, commitment to the common good in the form of strong support for public education, health care and social services, and a government that will protect the poor and vulnerable and redistribute income to promote greater economic equality.

To Robinson, America's past was never particularly capitalist. The postal system, land grant provisions, public education, national parks system, Homestead Act, electrification of the countryside, libraries, graduated income tax, Social Security system and GI Bill all serve to distribute or re-distribute wealth to benefit the population at large. Such policies reflect Christian values and have made America great. Today, they are denounced as Socialist, and the cause of weakness and dependency. Many urge lessening such programs to put America on its true path, or so it is said. And in this regard, the church is not without blame.

Why do many Christians support the bracing materialism of free market economics, assuming that persons always act from self-interest? Is it Christ-like to pursue "punitive severity toward the vulnerable"? Robinson pointedly notes, "In my Bible, Jesus does *not* say, "I was hungry and you fed me, though not in such a way as to interfere with free-market principles."

Interestingly, Robinson argues that the church's complicity is partly due to misreading of the Old Testament. For too many Christians, the God of the Old Testament is a national deity who is petty, vengeful and an immoral war-monger. Others assume that law is the opposite of love; preferring grace, mercy, love, they therefore shun the Old Testament.

In fact, the laws of Moses are designed to alleviate poverty, to prevent the accumulation of wealth in few hands and to provide for the marginalized. It is love in action. Mosaic law structures an economy based on a religious ethic. The laws exemplify being my brother's keeper, the shape of a culture and economy pleasing to God.

John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards (arguably America's greatest preacher) conclude from the Mosaic laws that support of the poor and marginalized is an unconditional Christian duty. The poor have a claim on Christians because they are made in the image of God. That claim holds even when the poor are undeserving, outside the faith, foreigners, ungrateful or contemptible.

Robinson's latest seeks to rediscover America's roots

According to Robinson, it is biblical principles that informed America's public policies until recently. At America's beginning Robinson finds John Calvin, Jesus and Moses, not perfectly, but given a broken world, as well as can be expected. When Christians turn their back on the Old Testament, she argues, they lack a Christian economic model and principles necessary to critique free market economics. "The loss of Moses was the defeat of Jesus, insofar as it was the hope of Jesus to bless and relieve the poor."

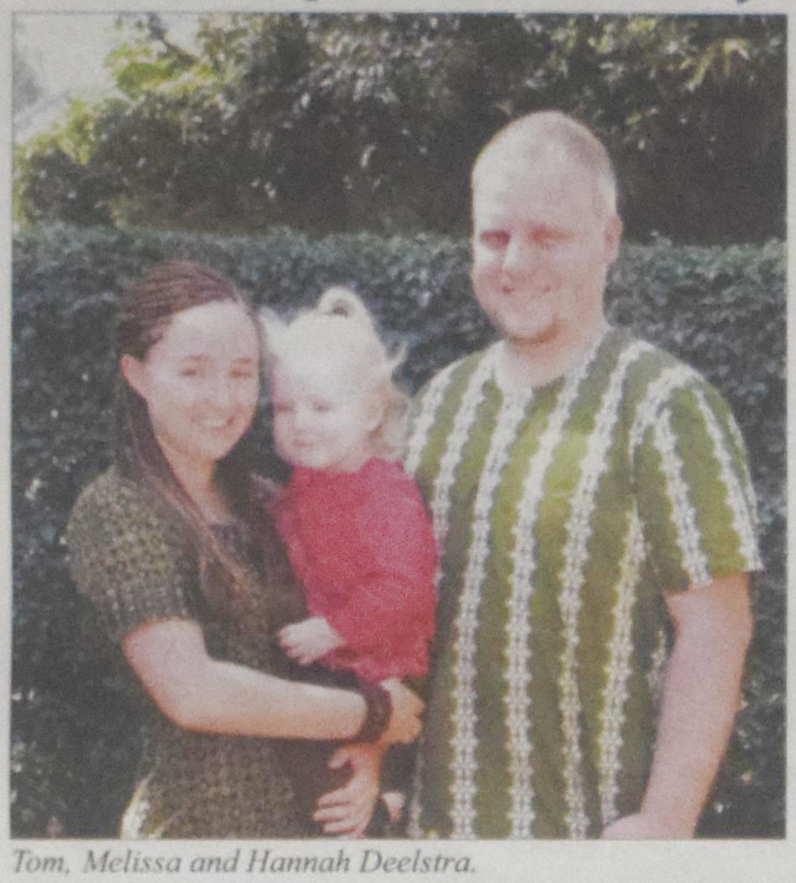
Robinson's voice is a lament but not without hope. She is filled with wonder at the mystery of creation, its unfolding and the flow of history. She places the brief trajectory of the American experiment within the much larger scope of God's time and purposes. Sin and grace, evil and good, baseness and nobility, disobedience and obedience darken but also exalt every person and all human effort.

Robinson is a gifted writer with unusual insight and wisdom. Her best-selling *Gilead* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2005. In this latest book of essays she suggests that if Jesus is God incarnate we may not separate the Old and New Testaments, that democracy depends on mutual respect, that religion and science, rightly understood, are not adversaries, that Darwinism cannot account for generosity and charity, that much nonsense is peddled as scientific fact and that Christians are called to be non-judgmental, full of generosity to all.

Robinson's is an important voice addressing Christians and atheists in authentic and winsome ways. One hopes to hear more.

Nick Loenen (nloenen@shaw.ca) worships at Ladner CRC.

God's improbable ways: teaching and learning in Jos, Nigeria



Tom, Melissa and Hannah Deelstra.

Tom Deelstra

I never thought I would be a candidate for overseas missions; then I got married and started a family. After my daughter was born, my wife and I began to seriously consider doing something completely different. We wanted our daughter to experience life outside North American culture if only for a short time. As I entered into the final year of my Bachelor of Education program, I began to look at teaching opportunities abroad. God led our family to consider Hillcrest, a missionary school in Jos, Nigeria. Having heard many positive reviews, we decided to at least complete the application for the school and for Christian Reformed World Missions. As I neared graduation and was still looking at teaching positions in Ontario schools, God slowly closed all doors but Hillcrest. So, on July 31, 2011, we checked our suitcases and boarded a plane headed for Nigeria.

Culture shock

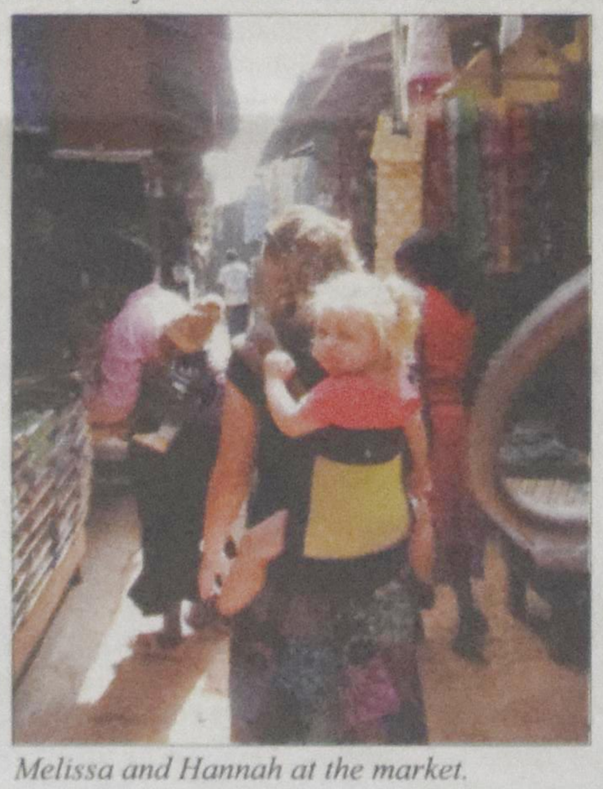
Our first days in Nigeria were ones of intense culture shock. We had been through missionary training and orientation, but nothing could prepare us for the sights, sounds and smells of a foreign country. After staying a night in one of Abuja's nicest guesthouses (we didn't realize it was nice until we stayed in other places!), we made the four-hour, pothole-riddled drive to Jos. I spent the majority of that trip with my eyes closed, trying unsuccessfully to prevent motion sickness, while my daughter succumbed early and puked nearly the entire time. A dignified entrance it was not.

When we drove through the gates into the Hillcrest compound, we were stunned to see red dirt, beautiful tall trees and – scores of security guards. We were led to our house and, after several introductions (greetings are very important in Nigeria), were left standing in our new cement brick home. It was the first time since our trip began that we could breathe normally again.

Over the coming days, we were shown tremendous grace by the Nigerians and local missionaries. As we adjusted to frequent power outages, the 4 a.m. Muslim call to prayer, the intense clash between extreme poverty and great wealth, new languages, tribal disputes, local currency and where to get our groceries, there was always someone ready to help and guide us.

Jos has played an important role in missions in Nigeria. Its temperate climate (a Nigerian on our flight in told me that Jos is like San Francisco) and location have made it a place of rest for missionaries. Today Jos serves as home base for many Nigerian missions agencies, including CRWM.

Hillcrest School started as a Christian day school for the Brethren Mission in 1942. Other missions began sending their children there and the school's governance grew to include eight different missions agencies. Hillcrest has always had an open enrollment policy, resulting in a mosaic of nationalities and faiths represented. I taught students from nearly every continent and from many of the major faith traditions. While the school used to be primarily for missionary children, approximately 80 percent of students today are Nigerian and ex-patriots.



Melissa and Hannah at the market.

I taught high school Bible within this dynamic. I remember feeling very nervous before the first day of school. What were my students going to be like? Could I pronounce their names? With uniforms having been recently implemented, how long would it take for me to be able to tell them apart? What was I, trained in elementary education, doing teaching high school?

Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) after being car-bombed on Feb. 26, 2012.

While not all my fears were relieved after the first day of school, I came home impressed with my students. They were respectful, gracious when I mispronounced their names, and genuinely helpful as I asked them questions about what they had learned in Bible class in previous years.

As a teacher, husband and father, I slowly found a routine. I began to enjoy the Hillcrest and Nigerian community, and teaching truly felt like a worthwhile endeavor ... most days. This routine was shattered in late August. Nigeria is divided between the mostly Muslim North and the Christian South. Jos is situated in the Middle Belt, and, as such, has seen periodic outbreaks of violence between tribes over the past decade.

As new missionaries, part of our orientation was security training. Along with several colleagues, we met one Monday morning in our home with our Missions Leader. Halfway through the session, our training turned into a real security situation as we heard gunshots outside our compound. Cell phones immediately started buzzing and violence in the streets shut down Hillcrest school for the rest of the week. Muslims were celebrating the end of Ramadan (Eid-el-Fitr) and tensions flared in the city, causing havoc between local Muslims and Christians.

Hope for the future

Thankfully, tensions abated and things returned to "normal." By now, I had learned all my students' names and was in the middle of an exciting curriculum with my classes. I discovered that Nigerians enjoy discussion, so we had many debates in class. In one particular session with my Grade 9s, we were talking about how a country can fight corruption and instability. The class went back

See ***Nigeria*** *p. 16*

Hillcrest School in Jos, Nigeria.

Hannah playing with local children.

Tom's classroom at Hillcrest.

Take it from a wise guy

James Calvin Schaap

My parents were gone for a couple days when I was a kindergartner, so I stayed with my grandma, who couldn't imagine me, a "scholar," as she called me, going off to school unspiffy. So she made me wear a bowtie. I had no desire to be Little Lord Fauntleroy, but that fancy thing stayed clipped on my starchy collar – she was, after all, my grandma. There I was, on the sidewalk, five years old and already stretched thin by the dissonance between parental values and my classmates' sense of fashion.

James in kindergarten.

In first grade, the kid in front of me, rambunctious, reached back over his head to my desk one morning and I grabbed his arm. Miss S. blew a gasket and ordered us both to go out in the hall.

Neither of us had a clue what behavioral code we'd broken or what "go out in the hall" meant, but we knew we'd sinned – after all, this was a Christian school. Once out there, Ivan said he had Twinkies in his lunch pail, so there we sat on the floor and ate them. Wasn't all bad.

Isn't it amazing, what sticks?

Officially, I am now retired, so for the first September since 1954 I won't be going to school. You read that right – 1954.

Even I think that's shocking, and a little depressing: count me among those very few who never really made it out of a classroom, which means I'm either a wise man or a plain fool. But on that score, I'm smart enough to say I'm not alone.

I've read, literally, thousands upon thousands of student papers, done hundreds of lectures, and tried to orchestrate discussions that never reached the intensity they had in my imagination the night or morning before.

With all that energy, all that enthusiasm, all those lesson plans, what stuck? I wonder. I really do.

Things we remember

In second grade I was in love with Miss D. I don't know how else to describe it. Years later, when I spoke at a teachers' convention, she introduced herself. How could I forget her face! Still – honestly – years later, my soul piped a lovely melody when I recognized her, as if, really, little had changed.

Third grade was split – the smart kids in one section, the not-sos in the other. I was with the smart kids, and the teacher was a consummate professional. It helped to listen to fourth graders, too, I'm sure of it, which is why when people my age talk about going to a one-room school, I buy their charmed nostalgia.

The classroom my fourth grade teacher created was sheer chaos. One cold day out on a pile of snow when some of us met together, I tried – at my parents' suggestion – to tell the really bad kids – I'm sure I was no goody-goody myself – that we all ought to cool it, that nothing good was happening in that room.

And I remember doing that sincerely because when chaos ruled it was plain awful – an adult woman, not young, hopelessly confounded by bad kids, mostly boys she was incapable of handling. I was no sweetheart, but in fourth grade there were days when I wanted to stay home. Sometimes kids think they'd like sheer chaos, but none of them really do.

Seems almost impossible now, but I remember that when Mrs. N. leaned over, we could see a goodly chunk of her breasts. And that became a game, after a fashion – Gary would ask her to look at something on his desk and we'd all have a look. Maybe that year I was no longer a little boy.

Mr. V., an immigrant from Holland and my fifth grade teacher, was very excitable and laughed, sometimes uproariously, in ways no teacher we knew ever had before, in a way we found almost cool because he wasn't condescending. He didn't expect bowties. He was our first male teacher – that, in itself, was fascinating, more so, I think for boys than for girls, in part because we became convinced he loved our girls. Sometimes they'd sit on his lap. He had his favourites too, and we knew it. I have no idea if what he did with those girls was wrong in any way, but *it was* with me, and some others.

Third grade.

It's amazing what we remember, what we don't forget.

We lined up outside beneath the long corridor of windows on the south side of the building for an all-school picture that year, the boys on folding chairs, girls standing behind us, an arrangement we felt morally wrong. Picture this now – I'm looking down between my legs, under the folding chair, tossing stones at the girls' legs – when I came up for air, I took a shot from Mr. Van Dyk across the chops that almost knocked me off the seat. He nailed me and then walked away, and I remember being honored by his fulsome slap because I was now in the company of men.

Our sixth grade teacher was a goofy guy with an ebullient personality who once strolled out on the newly black-topped basketball courts and hit a wild set shot from half court that left us almost eternally impressed. For the rest of the year, he could do no wrong.

I painted a halo and a beard on the kid on the safety poster tacked up on the door to the sixth grade room one Friday afternoon. I don't remember Mr. E. being all that angry, but my next report card carried a big fat D in the column on behavior. My parents were aghast. And me? I still feel somehow that grade was probably legitimate. Why? Because Mr. E. was a good teacher who hit a shot from half court. Even then, I wasn't mad.

Things we never forget

Spitballs were in during my late grade school years – not so much fired at each other, but as an element of the classroom's interior design – stuck on the ceiling, for instance, or gathered like a skin problem on the nose of Abraham Lincoln.

One Friday afternoon I rolled a thick one and whipped it up against the window where it hung like a spongy barnacle. It wasn't really a public act – I mean, it wasn't as if all my friends were watching. It was simply what we did. There that fat thing sat splatted on the window, a white plug of soggy refuse, gross as anything a middle school boy might love.

Mr. L. must have seen me because he said something I've never forgotten: "You," he said pointing angrily, "you – a Schaap!"

I don't know that anything that happened to me during my grade school years mattered as much in my life as that indictment because I'd never before thought of myself as "a Schaap," part of a wider community, an extended family, with its very own name and history. The idea that somehow a single sloppy spitball was a blot on the honor of my family album – my grandpa was a preacher, my father the town mayor – stayed with me as I walked home that night. That I was connected to something more than just my own body and heart and soul made me both larger than I was and, scarily, a whole lot more than what I'd ever wanted to be.

I was mad. I thought it was just awful of him to say that. After all, what on earth had that spitball to do with Rev. Schaap or Grandma Dirkse and her bowtie? I whipped the dumb thing, not them; but his denunciation had tied my entire family album into question, into that thing, in a way I thought horribly unjust and unfair.

But it's also all I remember of what happened in that classroom those two years. I don't know what educational professionals would say about Mr. L.'s kind of punishment, but, in retrospect, I didn't learn any other lesson as fully as that one, not in either of my last two grade school years.

Somewhere in a short story, one of Alice Munro's wonderfully complex characters, a mom, says that, painfully, what she's come to learn in the relationship she has with her adult children is that some of the things her children remember best about their childhoods are things she had never even regarded as important and had completely forgotten.

For the first nine years of my education as a child, I learned my multiplication tables and principles of English grammar; I wrote reports and did speeches; I'm sure I came to understand how birds fly and bees make honey; I knew something about the Civil War generals and a basic, hard-core Protestant view of the Reformation. I read stories and wrote poems. I made art – or something like it. I read books that were assigned and some that weren't; and when it was all over, I graduated from eighth grade into a high school career that was far more sports-crazy than it should have been. But that's another story.

Still, what I remember of the first nine years of my long career in a classroom has very little to do with content or lesson plans. That I learned what my teachers wanted me to is proven by the fact that I am Dr. James C. Schaap – I went on to college, to graduate school, and a career in teaching. It's disingenuous for me to insinuate that I learned nothing other than what I've just listed in this retrospective of my grade school life. I am a living, breathing bearer of their hard work, of their lesson plans. If my grade school teachers were to give me a report card today, I hope I would get As. This is, after all, the very first year I'm not going to be either in a desk or behind one.

And yet, what my memory won't drop is not what happened in recitation but in a different discourse altogether. I doubt that any of the teachers I've listed here – those who are still alive – would remember anything of what I just told you.

Choreographed education

Let's just say it the way it is: what happens in a classroom is more than pedagogy; what happens is borne of magic and mystery and miracle, all of it choreographed by someone whose eye is intently laid on far more than a few lowly sparrows or little boys in bowties.

And it's humbling, isn't it? Really, it's humbling.

But then, I'm thinking that what happens in a classroom isn't a whole lot different from what happens in life. Take it from someone who's spent an entire lifetime in school.

James Calvin Schaap taught at Dordt College. He is the author of over twenty books and recently published the devotional books Honest to God *and* Sixty at Sixty, *as well as* Rehoboth: A Place for Us. *He blogs at siouxlander.blogspot.com.*

Features

Communication is the key to a great school year

Heather Wright

I must admit as summer draws to a close, I can relate to the dancing, smiling dad in the commercial for back-to-school supplies; there are days when I, too, think the Tuesday after Labour Day is "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year." It wasn't always this way. The first year our oldest went to school, I spent a lot of time peeking through that small glass window in the classroom door, trying not to be seen, just to make sure she was doing okay. Emily was doing just fine. She loved Mrs. Robinson and she filled our supper table with talk about what happened in the kindergarten class that day.

I would talk with Mrs. Robinson – I've known her since we were children – but never asked any specific questions about how Emily was doing. So when it was time for our first parent/teacher conference, I was more than a little surprised to hear these words: "Emily is a quiet, shy, little girl who doesn't talk very much in class." I expressed my shock, inwardly thinking, "I can't remember the last time she shut up!" My husband and I always felt our headstrong firstborn – who started talking in complete sentences, not with "mamma" or "daddy" – would likely become the military leader of some small Central American country in the future! But in school, she was quiet.

Different perspectives

It became clear to me then: teachers and parents can have very different perspectives of the same child. The kicker is we both love them in our own ways and are trying to mold them into responsible adults. So what was I to say to Mrs. Robinson and subsequent teachers? At the time, I don't think I had any great insight to help her see the Emily we saw at home. I thought about videotaping a night at our dinner table just to prove I wasn't lying, but I didn't have to resort to that. Mrs. Robinson's kind personality made Emily feel more comfortable and she began to show her social side at school, too.

Explaining to teachers what your child needs can be daunting. Sometimes, like me, you simply don't know what to say. Sometimes unfortunate school experiences from your own childhood colour your view of teachers and make it difficult to be constructive. You may even think the teacher may not want you to throw in your two cents worth.

Parents should talk to teachers

But, as we start back to school this September, the teachers I interviewed were all in agreement that parents should talk to them and show an active interest at school to ensure their children get the most out of their education. "Keep up with what is going on in your child's academic and social life at school. Check their notes, read teacher mail with intent and follow with good discussion with your child," says Elisabeth Enzlin, a high school teacher in Chatham, Ont. She suggests marking quizzes and big assignments not just on your child's calendar, but on yours as well. "You aren't being nosey, just engaged. It is part of your investment in them, a kind of sharing that happens only for a little while. It is a form of love language that gives them a strong sense of security knowing you care about the little details of their lives." Jacquie DeRaaf, who teaches in North Dakota agrees. "Be interested, intentional and involved in and about the school experience for your child," she encourages parents.

According to former teacher Joanie Smids of Dresden, Ont. that engagement with your child can show them school and learning are just as important as your own daily work. "Parents who encouraged their children to be excited about learning – that education in and of itself was a very valuable thing – were very much appreciated," says Smids.

Michelle Tamming of Sarnia, Ont. concurs. "Giving students opportunities to talk to their family about their experiences and relate any joys or concerns they have will give them a sense of security for whatever may come their way," she says. And she says that communication shouldn't just be between parent and child. "Communication between parents and teachers is also an important part of educating children. When everyone has the best interests of the child at heart, it is so important to all be on the same page and working together."

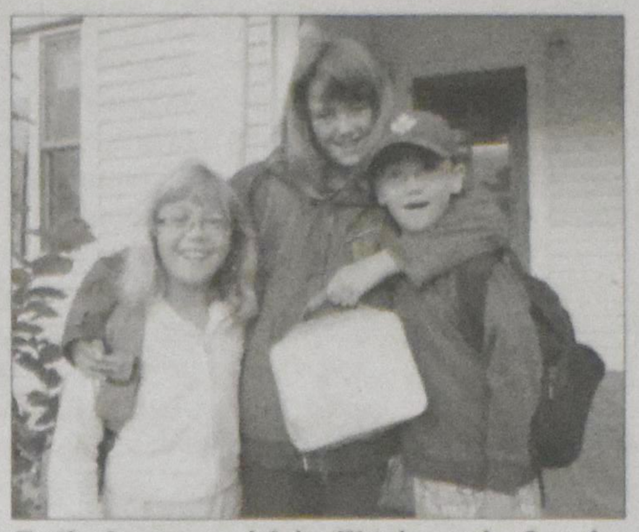
While teachers appreciate interested parents, there are parents who take interest and involvement to the extreme. Charlene Sluys of Chatham teaches Grade 1 and 2 students and says that occasionally parents need to relax a little. "Find the balance between motivating your child to give their all and realizing they're human. Sometimes giving 100 percent still only earns a C and that's alright," she added.

Parents of college-age students also need to step back occasionally, according to Elyse Lamszus, who teaches at Northern Illinois University near Chicago. "It's important to let go a little and trust that you've raised your children to be responsible adults who can meet deadlines and solve problems," says Lamszus. "It's important to check in with your kids and be supportive of the work they do and the activities they're involved in. However, you also won't do them any favors by swooping in to take charge of a situation, especially when you're not asked to."

Teachers should talk to parents

Deborah DeBoer of Wyoming, Ont. has seven children attending various institutions. She agrees that communication is critical, but she wants to make sure that teachers, and not just parents, share any problems they're having. She says, "If there's a problem with my kid, whether behavioral or learning or even with another classmate, I want to know so that I can work on it from the parenting end, and hopefully make the school hours less frustrating and disruptive for the teacher, classmates and my child." Debora Moelker of Dresden, Ont. also wants to know when there is a problem with her three girls in the classroom. She advises teachers, "Share the good things and the bad. Address issues early on before they become a bigger problem."

Kim Arnold, a mother of two from Hamilton, comments that sometimes a problem can *only* be addressed by collaborative attention from both teachers and parents. "The only way my child can succeed in school is through a partnership; the teacher is the professional, but I am the expert at parenting my child and will be part of his life forever," she says. For Arnold, that partnership is particularly crucial. Her son has Down Syndrome. She encourages teachers to ask about Aaron's disability and see beyond it. "The disability is only part of who my child is," she says.



Emily, Lauren and John Wright on the first day of school.

Seeing more of the "whole student" also concerns Ann Towell of Bothwell, Ont.. Her sons used to complain of sexism in the classroom with female teachers giving young, talkative girls a break over energy-filled boys. "Since boys learn differently than girls, the teachers need to accommodate some unruliness and be fair when it comes to the rules," she says. "If there is no talking in class, that rule should apply to both genders."

Issues like gender bias or having a teacher who isn't enthused about the profession anymore can have a lasting impact on a child. My own mother would hear Emily's stories about Mrs. Robinson and tell me how she wished my oldest brother had had a "Mrs. Robinson" in his formative years. Mom was once informed by his kindergarten teacher that she couldn't think of anything my brother was doing well in school. That type of attitude, thankfully, isn't seen often, but it did shape my brother's view of school forever.

Debora Moelker understands the influence teachers have on her children and wants them to make sure they understand it, too. "Never underestimate how important you are in a child's life," says Moelker. "Your hard work shapes young hearts and minds." Amanda VanderPloeg of Stratford, Ont. believes that teaching is a gift. "The patience and kindness" that her son's teacher shows is truly appreciated, she says.

It's not just parents who appreciate a gifted teacher; many of us are like Marianne VanderSpek of Florence, Ont. She grew up in Holland and kept in touch with her favourite teacher, Gert Ottevanger, until he passed away last year. "He would look me in the eye and listen carefully; then he would follow up with a positive action, guide me where I needed guidance, encourage me to excel, praise me where praise was due," she says. "That man was attentive at all times. He loved his job and he loved his classroom kids. If he had bad days, he knew how to hide it, because I don't remember one single incident where he would be inattentive or short with anyone." As VanderSpek's own children finish their education, she is reminded what "an enormous presence" Mr. Ottevanger was in her life: "I hope that every teacher strives for this: to be a positive beacon in the young lives they help mold." She knows this is a tall order – she admits she wouldn't have the patience for the job herself. That's why she loved Mr. Ottevanger and sought him out long after she left his classroom. "He knew how much he meant to me."

Those feelings are not unique. There are still teachers who inspire today. I know because my children are fortunate to have teachers just like Mr. Ottevanger; people who, like me, desire to shape their young hearts, not just to love learning, but to live as Christ to those around them.

Heather Wright lives in Petrolia, Ont. and is a freelance journalist working in both radio and newspaper in Sarnia/ Lambton.

Columns

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke

The view from the bridge

As a child I always loved walking, and even more so when at the age of 12, I got a dog to keep me company. Lady and I spent many pleasant days wandering on the back roads, along riverbanks or down railway tracks. Already back then, trains were disappearing in rural Ontario and the tracks were all but abandoned.

Sometimes my father would join us. I treasure memories of walking for miles at his side, listening to stories of his childhood, the war or his early days in Canada. He lectured me sternly about walking along the tracks. I was never to walk along any stretch where I couldn't easily get off the tracks and stand safely aside. I was supposed to always listen for the rumble of an approaching train, and always have the dog on a leash, so I wouldn't have to chase her if a train was coming.

He told me about a vagabond who had travelled all over Europe in the 1900s by walking the train tracks. The man had hiked along tracks for so long that he permanently walked in the peculiar rhythm most efficient for traversing railroad ties – short step, short step, long stride. As an old man he wrote his escapades into a collection of stories that my father loved to read.

One day as a teenager I took a different direction on the tracks and discovered a railway bridge that spanned the river. It became my personal quiet time haven – a private sanctuary whenever I needed time alone. From its edge I could dangle my legs over the embankment and drop stones into the murky water below – contemplating the ripples and dealing with my adolescent angst, or just daydreaming. And yes, I could puff on the occasional cigarette without fear of getting caught.

At some point I took a notion to walk over that bridge. I would have to leave Lady at home, of course. Clearly the short step, short step routine wouldn't work. And there were no handrails. (probably because there weren't supposed to be any pedestrians). There really was no place to get off if a train appeared. But then, in all the time I spent on the tracks, I had never seen a single train.

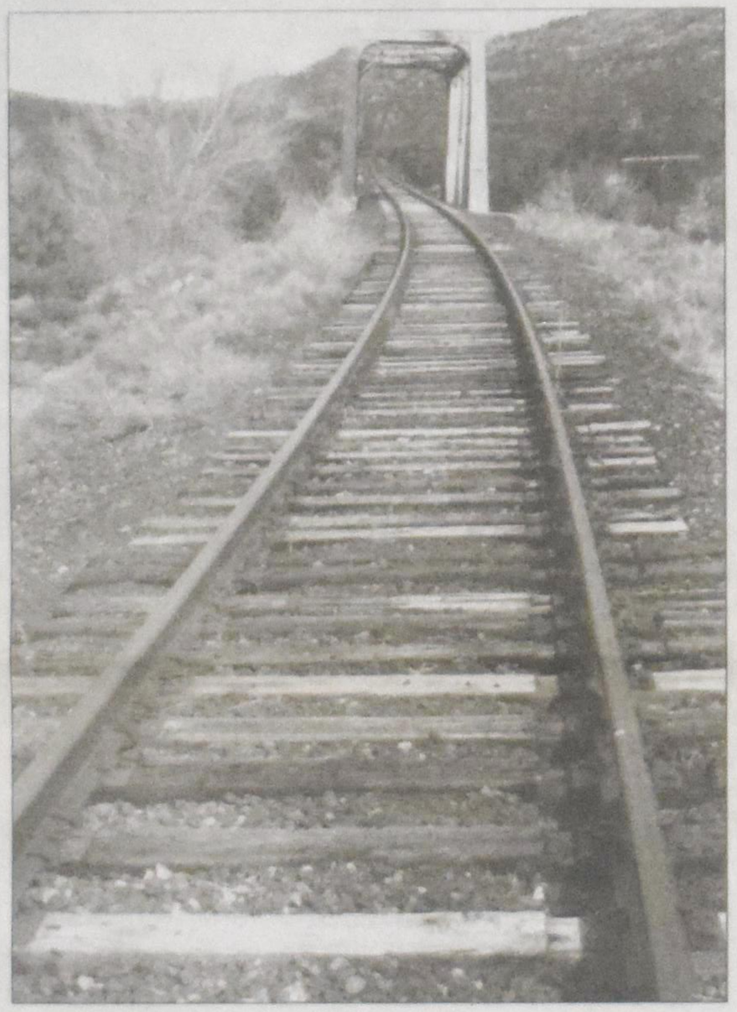
A matchless sight

So, one afternoon I stood at the beginning of the bridge, looked down the tracks as far as I could, and started walking. I focused on the beams, refusing to look down between the gaps, taking my time with short little steps. The middle of the bridge afforded me a brand new panorama. To my left the river gurgled over rocks and narrowed in the distance. In the other direction trees hugged the one bank, and horses and cows grazed in a field on the other side.

Once across I continued along the rails. I crossed a highway overpass and arrived at the Union Cemetery, another perfect hangout for a teenage introvert. I meandered among the gravestones, reading names and dates, some from as far back as the 1800s. For whatever reason, I thoroughly enjoyed the whole strange excursion.

I trekked across the bridge several more times that summer. Then one day I was about 30 feet out on the bridge and suddenly I fixated on the water below – far below. No matter how I tried, I could no longer focus on the beams instead of the gaps. I stood trembling for a few minutes. The distance behind me was shorter than that ahead. I convinced myself to turn around and began faltering steps back to my starting point. I stopped several times to muster the courage to continue. Finally I stood on solid ground.

I never crossed that bridge again, although I continued to spend delightfully lonely hours there.



Those memories flooded back to me recently as I read Hugh Cook's latest novel, *Heron River*. In the final scene one of his characters crosses a railway bridge, pursuing something innately familiar and yet mysteriously elusive. Midway fear paralyzes him. But through the incident he beholds a sight he could not have seen from any other vantage point.

I reflected on the symbolism in the story as well as my own experience nearly 40 years ago. The railway bridge makes an apt metaphor for my Christian life. If I don't focus on each beam and keep making short steps I could easily lose my footing. Like the young man in the book I have to resist the voice of discouragement, and believe the voice that calls me to safety. I have no choice but to press on, and I cannot allow fear to cripple me.

But the view from here is like no other. And I can only imagine what waits for me on the other side.

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

Artful Eye

MARIANNE VANDERSPEK

A kernel of wheat

"Unless a kernel of wheat dies…"

That grain we know so well.
Bins brimming with those hard kernels
so brittle you could break your teeth on them.

Let them lie in the palm of your hand.
Imagine them on hold and intact
for centuries
in the dry darkness of an Egyptian pyramid.

Stoop to bury them in the earth
where rain will fall gently or in blustery gusts,
and sun will flame its coral tentacles
through the soil around these tight husks
until a small resurrection occurs.
A living leaf the color of life and limes
unfolds and blossoms.

Let me be like that hard grain of wheat.
May my selfish desires die in the palm of your nail-scarred hand.
May my heart be softened by your steadfast love
until it breaks open with vibrant new life
and produces fruit.

Linda Siebenga

MARIANNE VANDERSPEK

Marianne VanderSpek is a farmer and photographer living in Florence, Ont.

Linda Siebenga is a poet living in Central Alberta. Her latest work is Earth Against Your Cheek. *Find Linda's website at* ***inscribe.org*** *under Members.*

Columns

My Window Seat

Mendelt Hoekstra

Seven people said "I do": *Blending families*

My family is two years new. I am a part of a "blended family" – which, in my case, means that my three biological kids and I married a woman and her two biological kids. Although in some blended families, kids look enough alike that one could think that all were biological, that's not the case with us. We have three whitish, blonde-haired kids with fair complexions and two very dark-haired kids. There is a real beauty in that.

The kids have "blended" well. I spoke to someone who found herself in a similar situation years ago, but her family didn't blend; at the beginning, they crashed. For us, the past two years have needed a tonne of prayer, a tonne of hard work and a tonne of questions to people who are wiser than us and have had similar experiences.

The few "you're not my dad!" outbursts seem to have stopped permanently. They weren't stopped by punishment, rules or consequences. They were stopped by a look. A look in my eyes that must have shown that I was so hurt, it was even evident to a seven year old. It was over then. When you go through grief as a young child, I think you become more sensitive to the grief of others.

The truth is, however, that sometimes life is overwhelming for everyone. The reality of our situation is that four of us visit one grave regularly, and three of us visit a different grave regularly. That is a strange reality. This actually happens in our house: "I'm going to the cemetery today," says Shannon or I.

"Which cemetery?" asks a child.

Sigh. It's still tough.

Chicken and prayer

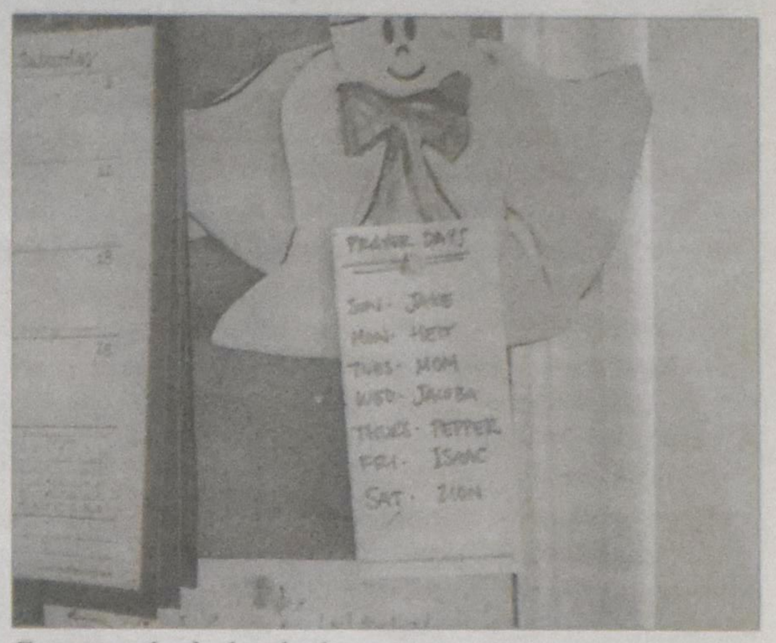
We have many lists in the house: a list for going to school, coming home from school, morning and bedroom routines. Lists save a lot of questions. With seven days in the week and seven of us, we have a list for each person's chore and task for each day of the week. My day is every Monday, which means that Monday is my chicken and prayer day. I top up the chicken feed and water, and collect the eggs. Once a week isn't that bad. The prayer day list also says that Monday is my prayer day, so during each meal, I lead the prayer. When the kids pray (Wednesday through Sunday), they start each prayer with "Dear Father in Heaven, please be with Mommy Marisa in Heaven. Please be with Daddy Michael in heaven." To pray for someone who is already in heaven doesn't feel Reformed, but nonetheless the practice is one we are going to keep.

The kids, who are now six, seven, eight, nine and ten years old, talk to each other about their "former" life with very little emotion. Our six year old recently told a supper-time story about a vacation, and our seven year old asked when the vacation happened.

Her response? "It happened before we were all married."

Priceless.

In this blended family, I inherited hockey players and Shannon inherited musicians. We now have hockey player musicians and musicians that know about hockey (and the snack bar at each arena in the Niagara region). Shannon never thought she'd see Jacob singing solos in church and coffee houses. I never thought I'd see Zion pick vegetables to eat by choice. It is good to be a team.



Everyone feeds the chickens; everyone prays.

I understand that the teenage years are soon upon us (for three years straight we will have five teenagers in the house), and we will tackle them the same way we are tackling each day: with God's grace, and lists.

Mendelt Hoekstra is a husband, father of five, Music Therapist and very part-time chicken farmer. His prayer day is Monday.

Roots and Wings

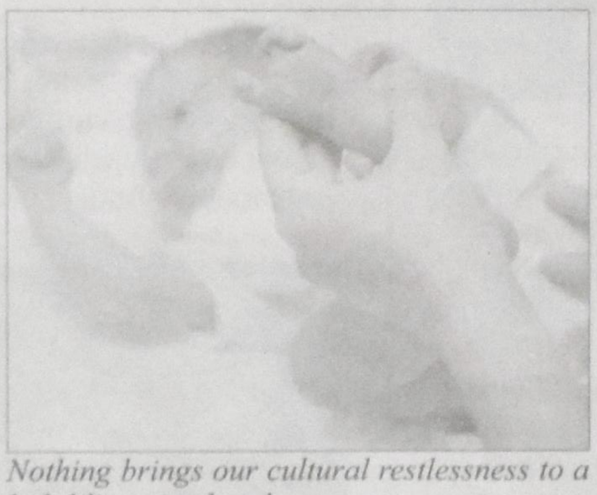
Emily Cramer

A culture of beginnings

I am sitting in a hotel room in near-pitch darkness, estimating the location of the "g" and "h" on the keyboard. We have been at a wedding, and just as the dessert was being served I had to leave. It was an hour past the baby's bedtime, and she was showing signs of wear. So here I sit in my pajamas in the dark – typing *quietly* – while the festivities are just gearing up in the ballroom below.

A few years ago, my husband and I were at this same hotel to celebrate my birthday. It was just the two of us then, and we got up late, went snowshoeing all afternoon, and lingered for hours over dinner in the lakeside restaurant. The sun set over the frozen bay and the ice went mauve before disappearing into night. When we had long overstayed the dinner hour, we bundled up and went outside for a midnight walk in the crackling cold.

Returning to this place several years later, the contrast is striking. As we hauled what seemed like a month's worth of baby gear up the elevator earlier today, we "remembered when." It was one of those moments when the present hits hard and you have to catch your breath at the person you've become. "When did that happen?" you think, and the magnitude of the change is too weighty to process. Having a baby is like no other life experience; it's so . . . permanent.



Nothing brings our cultural restlessness to a halt like parenthood.

Our culture does not prepare us well for life-long experiences like parenthood. Ours is a culture of beginnings, a culture of change, where one needs to think only as far as the next version. We are always looking to upgrade: apps, gadgets, careers. I don't mean to suggest that this is unique to 2012; something in the human condition has probably always been on this rampage for more and better. But there does seem to be a link between the pace of technological change and the pace of our modern lifestyles. When a broken television is more expensive to repair than to replace, and when last year's computer is virtually obsolete this year, how can our deepest psychological selves not be influenced to process time differently?

I notice this in movies, the perennial popularity of the "rom com." We are almost addicted to the boy-meets-girl scenario, believing, it seems, that the right person can make everything right. Films about elderly couples or couples in the height of life's busy routines hardly ever become box office smashes, if they are made at all. This is noteworthy in a society with an historically high divorce rate.

No app for that

But nothing brings our cultural restlessness to a halt like parenthood. It doesn't take long for the new baby glow to ebb in the constancy and repetition of care tasks. There is no going backward, no younger version, no upgraded model.

Our race towards newness might really be a mad dash away from tedium or hard work.

Several of my friends have chosen not to have kids because they are not prepared to make any decision they can't escape. The culture of beginnings hinges on this fear, and our race towards newness might really be a mad dash away from tedium or hard work.

Yet in the midst of all the busyness that was born with my daughter, I have glimpses of something greater than me taking place. I once heard it said that character is not formed in life's significant moments but in the hundred tiny decisions we make each day. We were made for permanence, for the slow growth that comes through hard effort, for relationships that grind away our roughness like millstones working each other smooth across the years.

So I am writing this article to myself, as a reminder. I too am a product of this culture of beginnings, and I am inclined to upgrade, or run, whichever is easier. But I suspect that the reality forming through marriage and parenthood – sometimes a sobering reality – is teaching me about a God of permanence who does not run from me. On the hard days, when he seems hidden in piles of laundry and silent behind the baby's wailing, I am being held still, like a colt, broken for a purpose. There is a lot of learning left, but fortunately, my daughter is young and I like to think of our relationship as permanent.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She has just devoured Stephen Chbosky's beautiful novel, The Perks of Being a Wallflower.

Columns

The Public Square

Harry Antonides

Michele Bachmann vs Keith Ellison

"I've come here in Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and show common principles – principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings. . . ."

President Obama, Cairo University, 2009.

While President Obama has worked hard, for almost four years, to fundamentally transform America (as he promised/threatened to do), nearly all the focus has been on healthcare and the economy. Meanwhile, the Obama administration's relationship with the Muslim world is undergoing a far-reaching change that has not received the attention it deserves, thanks to the lack of critical reporting in the mainstream media.

Three years ago, Obama told his Cairo audience, which included members of the Muslim Brotherhood, that he considers it "part of my responsibility as President of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear." He has kept that promise. Since then, the Obama Administration has imposed radical changes in its policies toward Islam.

Five Republican Members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, led by Michele Bachmann, have initiated a discussion about that topic. The five have written to the Inspectors General of the Departments of Defense, State, Justice, Homeland Security and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. These letters requested a "multi-department investigation into potential Muslim Brotherhood infiltration into the United States Government."

Bachmann wants an investigation into the alleged infiltration of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Word soon spread about these letters, and Michele Bachmann was met with a barrage of vitriol and character assassination. Her fellow Minnesotan and the first (of two) Muslim Congressmen, Keith Ellison, was quick to attack Bachmann, and he demanded that she back up her request for this investigating with relevant facts. On July 13, Bachmann answered Ellison with a 16 page letter of explanation complete with 59 footnotes (available online).

Killing free speech

Bachmann points out that government departments and agencies are advised by organizations and individuals that "the U.S. Government itself has identified in federal court as fronts for the international Muslim Brotherhood." She finds it a matter of "genuine concern" that despite this known fact, the U.S. Government continues to associate with these groups.

Bachmann says it is incorrect to classify the Muslim Brotherhood as a "largely secular" organization, as the U.S. Director of National Intelligence did. She points out that Brotherhood documents call their work a "civilian Jihadist process," intent on "destroying the Western civilization from within." Bachmann also sees Secretary Clinton's efforts to establish Islam-friendly speech control as a violation of the U.S. constitution.

This letter warrants the attention not only of American citizens but also from the rest of us, because we are directly affected by America's craven response to treacherous Islam. (See also Andrew C, McCarthy, "Questions about Huma Abedin," *National Review Online*, July 21, 2012.)

President Obama is obviously determined to interpret his task to "fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear" so widely that he closes his eyes to the reality of supremacist Islam that is striving to establish Allah's rule everywhere. The current election campaign will further distract Americans from this reality. Meanwhile, political correctness serves as a cover for the Obama administration to transform America by teaming up with people whose agenda is fundamentally alien to what is best about this country.

Bachmann and her four colleagues have raised an issue that goes to the heart of America's existence as a free nation. The very fact that this took exceptional courage and that they have to brace themselves for the worst kind of slander tells you a lot about the precarious state of America. Despite that, they have done a good and honourable thing, deserving the gratitude of every person who treasures freedom and truth.

Harry Antonides is the former director of research and education for the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC). He lives in Willowdale, Ont., and can be reached at hantonides@sympatico.ca.

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien

The art and skill of old-time farming has vanished

Do you know how you can tell a fake farmer from a real one? Now I'm not saying there are lots of fake farmers around, or people pretending to be farmers. Farming isn't a glamorous occupation. But one way to weed the wheat from the chaff, so to speak, is to see how guys handle a hayfork, a shovel or a bale of hay. Fake farmers tend to throw loose hay. Real ones will place it in one spot – intact. It's the same when digging a hole. An experienced worker puts the soil in a neat pile beside the hole. Someone who doesn't know how to dig will throw the earth away, willy-nilly. You see that in the movies a lot. I grimace when fellows are digging a hole to bury something and they toss dirt away instead of piling it up neatly. If you see lads with huge gloves that come up half way to their elbows when handling bales, that's another clue that they are new to the trade.

You can also tell who isn't a farmer by the way small bales are piled onto a half-ton truck or on a trailer. Farmers know how to place the bales so they don't shift. The load doesn't have to be strapped down with ropes to keep it in place. I chuckle when I see bales jutting out everywhere and the entire load strapped down with many lengths of rope.

A few weeks ago I watched a documentary on television about agriculture in the U.S. after World War II. I could tell that the men forking hay onto a hay wagon, and the man on top, were experienced farmers. They didn't throw forkfuls of hay, scattering it; they deliberately placed the forkfuls.

A fertile history

Ontario hosts an International Plowing Match (IPM) each summer, even crowning a Queen of the Furrow. This year the plow-offs are held in Waterloo Region, culminating with a Queen of the Furrow Banquet on Sept. 20. The antique machinery section at an IPM is always incredibly good. You can see steam-powered engines – big or small – chugging away. They are on display sawing logs, making cedar shingles, threshing grain – whatever farmers did in the steam era. Real farmers operate these.

I always enjoy watching a threshing mill at work. It brings back memories of chaff floating in the air, and itchy backs. A tractor equipped with a pulley running a long belt powers a threshing mill. Two men are on the wagon, forking sheaves into the jaws of the mill. A steady stream of straw blows out of the straw pipe. A few men at one IPM baled a straw pile using a stationary wire-tie baler.

Except for two small loads of awful-looking sheaves, it was a perfect look at old-time farming.

I remember neat sheaves and stooks of grain when I was a boy. The first few rows of sheaves were forked onto a wagon – bottoms to the outside. As the load was built higher, it would come in a bit each time. The sheaves were placed so the load wouldn't fall apart. When it was time to unload, the men could see each sheaf. It wasn't a tangled mess.

An elderly man standing in front of me at one IPM had a skeptical look on his face as he watched a half-wagon load of sheaves at the threshing mill area. He probably had the same thoughts as I did. If the load were any bigger, some of the sheaves would most likely slide off. I asked him if he had ever seen such sloppy sheaves.

He shook his head. "Pretty sloppy is right. The stuff's too long. Can't tie it right. They should have cut a field of barley," he said.

Real farmers know how to stack sheaves.

Some years ago I read an article about young farmers harvesting grain the old-fashioned way. A neighbour had a threshing mill that hadn't been used in years. With some mechanically-minded friends, they had worked on the machinery during the winter.

A photo showed the lads sitting on top of a big load of sheaves with grins on their faces. They were proud they had "bindered" the field of grain using a five-foot cut binder. The sheaves had been stooked and were now ready to be threshed.

The young farmers were to be commended for their hard work and effort. But I had to laugh at the load. It was the most awful load of sheaves I have ever seen. It looked like a huge mop. So what! They had fun and they did some old-time farming. But still, the art and skill of old-time farming and building solid loads has all but vanished from Canada's agricultural landscape.

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew-area farmer. He attends an IPM event every two to three years.

News

Getting ready to roll:
CRC bikers plan cross-Canada, First Nations tour

Motorcycles: a new tool of reconciliation?

Walter Miedema

Thirty motorcyclists are making plans for Turtle Island Ride, a "listening tour" for members of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The motorcyclists hope to cross Canada by motorcycle, summer of 2013, and visit various First Nations communities along the way. The trip's intent is two-fold: for the riders to hear firsthand from various First Nations groups how Christians can offer better respect and support, and to raise awareness among the CRC of First Nations issues in Canada.

The ride will begin in Brantford, Ont. June 23 *(D.V.)*, and end in Duncan, British Columbia on July 12, 2013. The riders will stop at Christian Reformed Aboriginal Ministry Centres in Winnipeg, Regina and Edmonton. Turtle Island Ride gets its name from the title many First Nations give to the continent of North America.

An event in Aylmer, Ontario, August 25 and 26 inspired listeners, publicized next year's ride, and began the process of listening and discussion. Rev. Joseph Gilbert, former chief of the Walpole Island First Nation, near Wallaceburg, Ontario, and pastor of an independent congregation, spoke frankly and pointedly about the general perceptions that Canadian society has regarding First Nations issues. He held an eagle feather to symbolize his intention to speak the truth about how First Nations people have been treated. At one point, he stated that only 18 percent of government funds set aside for First Nations people actually reach First Nations communities.

Rev. Gilbert's eagle feather symbolizes truth.

Rev. Gilbert also related some of his personal life history, including growing up in poverty, his conversion experience as a young boy, his calling to the ministry at a young age and his entry into politics. He stated that he saw his move into politics not as a move away from ministry, but as stepping into a different type of ministry.

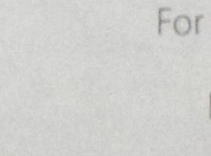
Following Rev Gilbert's talk, about 30 motorcycles (some with more than one rider), drove a two-hour circuit through Port Burwell, Port Bruce and Port Stanley, returning to Aylmer for a light dinner. During the meal, many attendees posed questions to Rev. Gilbert concerning First Nations issues.

On Sunday, Rev. Gilbert preached a message on John 14: 27, which focused on how Christians should seek to expand the peace that Jesus has made between us and God into a peace that exists between all people and nations of the world. Naturally, his message focused on seeking peace between First Nations peoples and those of us who are more recent immigrants to Turtle Island.

Rev. Gilbert was generally well received; although some people questioned the appropriateness of his remarks regarding immigration to Canada, he stated that even the most recent immigrants to Canada have more rights and social support that First Nations people generally do.

Rev. Bruce Adema, former Director of Canadian Ministries of the CRC, is one of the motorcyclists getting ready to roll next summer. "The eclectic group members have this in common," Adema says, "we are glad to be members of Christ's Church, we really like our motorcycles, and we believe that we can move ahead in the ministry of reconciliation and renewal."

Those interested in joining the Turtle Island Ride can contact the Canadian Ministries office at turtleislandride@crcna.org.



Walter Miedema is a recent graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, currently on internship at Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Saskatoon, Sask.

Nigeria ...continued from p.10

and forth with different suggestions. Then a thoughtful Nigerian student put up her hand and said, "I think it has to start with providing high-quality education." As a teaching missionary, I was thrilled. Nigeria is a country where public education is not valued, and for her to recognize this flaw in the country's infrastructure was very astute. I could not have been more proud. It was a tremendous answer that showed her critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

This story is one of many. I could tell you about Ahmed (not his real name), an incredibly bright and respectful Muslim student who brought in a goat as part of an Old Testament presentation. I could tell you about my freshman class whose growth and maturation throughout the year was astounding. I could tell you about the Bible book projects my sophomores made and then shared with elementary students. Or I could tell you about my seniors, a remarkable bunch of students who WILL make a positive difference in Nigeria one day. Or maybe I would tell you about the day we spent with 30 juniors and seniors at a home playing with children who have HIV/AIDS. But to share one story would mean to share them all, and there is not enough space for that!

I will, however, share the mark my students left on me. I saw the importance of respect, the value of hard work, tremendous courage in the face of adversity, the strength of community in times of crisis and, most importantly, an unshakeable faith in Jesus Christ. Never were these qualities more manifested than in late February and early March, when *Boko Haram*, a fundamentalist Muslim terrorist group bent on taking control of the country, sent suicide bombers into multiple churches in Jos, and later attacked other churches, government buildings and police stations throughout Nigeria. My students had lived through crisis before, but terrorism is much different and very frightening.

Facing terrorism together

In these tense moments, days and weeks, the school community rallied together. We prayed for God's protection and continued our daily activities. Committees came together to figure out how best to increase compound security. Events were reworked rather than cancelled. Students made do with changes in school hours and athletic programs. *Moms in Touch* made prayer walks around the school. Together, as a community, we were able to see the school year through to its conclusion.

After the last exams were marked and school was officially closed for the summer, we returned to Canada. Because of the uncertain security situation in Nigeria, our mission evacuated families with small children. Through the many blessings and burdens of living in Jos, I grew in my faith, in my profession, and in my role as a husband and father. I learned what it means to trust in God for everything, including my physical safety. I learned that children in Nigeria are just as capable as Canadian students, especially when given similar educational opportunities. Worshipping in Nigerian churches, I learned that God is truly at work across the globe, and that his people are responding to his call, perhaps with even more fire than those in North America.

Most of all, I am thankful that God gave me, a seemingly unlikely candidate for overseas missions, the chance to serve him in Africa. I am thankful that he uses his people in improbable ways to further his kingdom. I am thankful for Hillcrest and the work that is being done both there and in all Christian schools worldwide to bring the Good News to every nation, tribe, people and language.

Tom Deelstra is currently teaching in the Chatham Christian Schools.

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Classifieds

Obituaries

A resident of Chatham and formerly of Holland Christian Home, Brampton

Harmke Damm (nee Goeree),

passed away peacefully at the Riverview Gardens Nursing Home on Thursday, August 16, 2012 at the age of 96.

Cherished wife of Donald Damm (†1995). Loving mother to John Damm (Neeltje) of Chatham, Garry Damm (Irene) of Port Colborne, Klaassien "Kathy" Mans (†1985), Klasske "Katie" Hunter (†2005), and Peter Damm (†2011).

Survived by sons-in-law John Mans of Dunnville, Dan Hunter of British Columbia, and daughter-in-law Gerda Damm of Chatham.

Forever missed by her many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren.

Predeceased by her 3 sisters, and 1 brother.

Harmke enjoyed knitting, and was a helping hand to the nurses at Riverview Gardens Nursing Home.

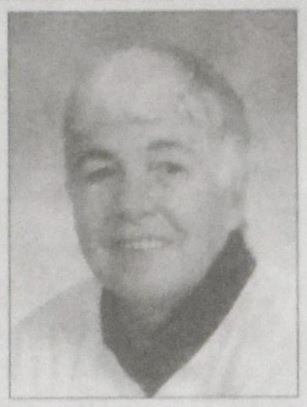
A Funeral Service took place at the First Reformed Church in Chatham with Rev. Pieter Schinkelshoek officiating.

Donations in memory of Harmke Damm to the First Reformed Church would be appreciated by the family. Online condolences may be left at **mckinlayfuneralhome.com.**

With deep sorrow I wish to share the sudden passing of

Amelia 'Amy' Akkelina Tinga Geisterfer

on July 31, 2012.



In a terrible incident my former wife, the mother of our eight children was caught in a house fire and passed away due to smoke inhalation. This heart-felt loss was shared by our many friends and family in Edmonton, Alberta. The sudden, tragic accident claimed mother Amy at the age of 79 years. She had a life of devotion and love for her family and is now joyfully with Jesus in heaven.

It was a difficult and painful road when all the children went to Edmonton to pay their last honour and respect to their beloved mother. At the funeral their mother's faithful prayer was quietly spoken with conviction: *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference* – through the witness of the Holy Spirit and God's Word in our hearts and among the saints here on earth. Almighty God, thank you that Amy always knew your holy presence here on earth.

Heavenly Father, thank you that we may know you intimately. Abide with us all. Amen – Aren Geisterfer

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To contact John: 288 Morrison Drive
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Executive Pastor

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Complete details can be found on our website at **www.newlifecrc.ca**.

Please send a cover letter, statement of faith, and resume to: EP Search Team, New Life Church
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The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA)
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with Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI), a ministry of the CRCNA.

This position is based in Burlington, Ontario office. This person will be responsible for: Building relationships of joint ministry between Canadian congregations and BTGMI; developing strong relationships with congregational volunteers and select major donors; and serving as liaison within the Canadian office.

In keeping with our Equal Opportunity policy, we encouraged applicants from any ethnic (racial) community and applicants with disabilities.

For more information or to apply visit **crcna.org/jobs**.
For consideration complete an on-line application attaching a cover letter and resume by September 21, 2012.

Co-Pastor

Hebron CRC, Whitby, ON seeks a pastor with outreach-focused vision who will help equip and mobilize others for service, who will shepherd growth in the areas of disciple-making, prayer and missional living, and who will help us discern and obey the Spirit's leading as we seek to be Christ to the community and the world. We seek a pastor who will share in the preaching, who has a passion for small group ministry and pastoral care. Our mission is to make passionate disciples of Jesus Christ.

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Advertising

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1								4
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	4		3	6	1		9	
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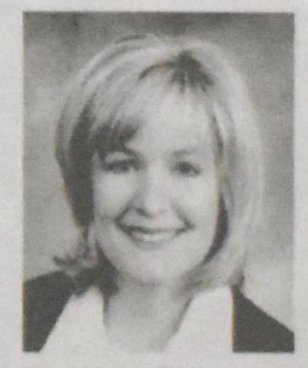

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sep 9 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Peter Breedveld will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Sep 15,16 Blyth CRC 50th anniversary. See ad for details.

Sep 18 " Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Musica Sacra Chorus". **Ancaster**, Redeemer College Auditorium at 8 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep19 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Grimsby**, Mountainview Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm. See hollandchristianmalechoir.com

Sep 21 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Brampton**, Holland Christian Homes at 1:30 pm See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sept 21 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Liberation Choir" with Sharon Sandink director. **Georgetown** Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm.

Sep 22 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. Durham Christian Homes, **Whitby** at 1:30 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 24 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp. First Christian Reformed Church, **Kingston**, at 8 pm. See: www.hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 26 "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp and "The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir" with Margaret van Dyk as director. Calvin Christian Reformed Church, **Ottawa** at 8 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 27 "Good By Evening" "Holland Christian Male Choir" Freddy Veldkamp as director. Cephas Christian Reformed Church, **Peterborough** at 8 pm. More information: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.

Sep 30 River Park CRC, **Calgary**, Alberta, formerly known as First CRC, will celebrate 60 years of God's faithfulness at a special service at 10:00 am.. 3818-14A St. SW.

Oct 20 Day of Encouragement Theme: Anointed for Action.Registration opens at 8:15 AM. Day ends at 4:00 Hamilton District Christian High School, 92 Glancaster Rd, **Ancaster**. Info: www.diaconalministries.com. Email: dayofencouragement@crcna.org Phone: 905-336-0967 ext. 278

Oct 21 Lucknow Community Christian Reformed Church of **Lucknow**, Ont., Canada will celebrate 60 years of God's faithfulness with a Celebration Worship Service at 10:00 am. Everyone is welcome.

Nov 2 Christian Festival Concert 7:30 pm. Roy Thomson Hall, **Toronto**. See ad for more details.

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River Park

River Park CRC
in Calgary, Alberta, formerly known as **First CRC**, will celebrate **60 years** of God's faithfulness at a special service on **Sept. 30**, at 10 a.m.

If you know someone who my enjoy reading Christian Courier, send us their name and address and we will send them the next few issues at no charge. Call Rose at 1-800-969-4838 or email rose@christiancourier.ca.

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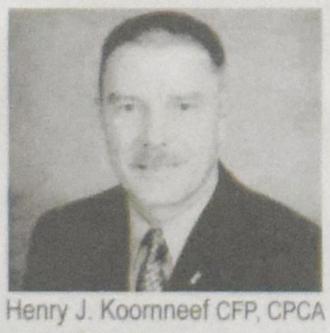

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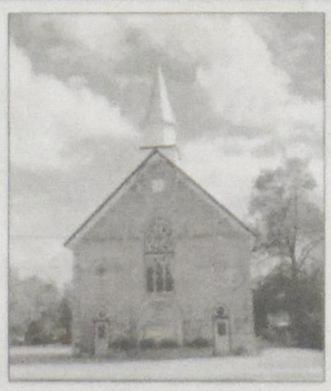

Blyth CRC
hopes to celebrate their **50th anniversary**
Sept.15 & 16, 2012.

There will be a **breakfast** on Saturday 8-11 a.m. and an **Open House** 2-4 p.m. A **special service** will be held Sunday at 10 a.m. Everyone is invited to come and celebrate with us.

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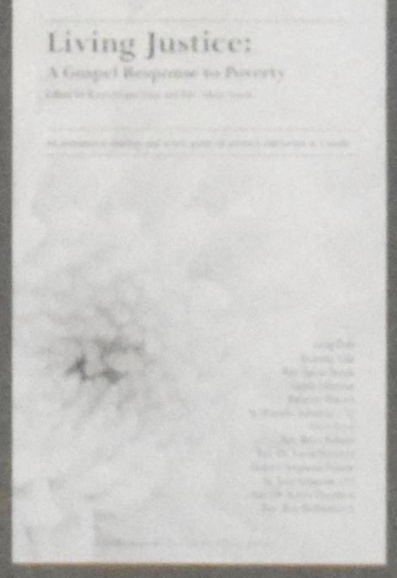

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